

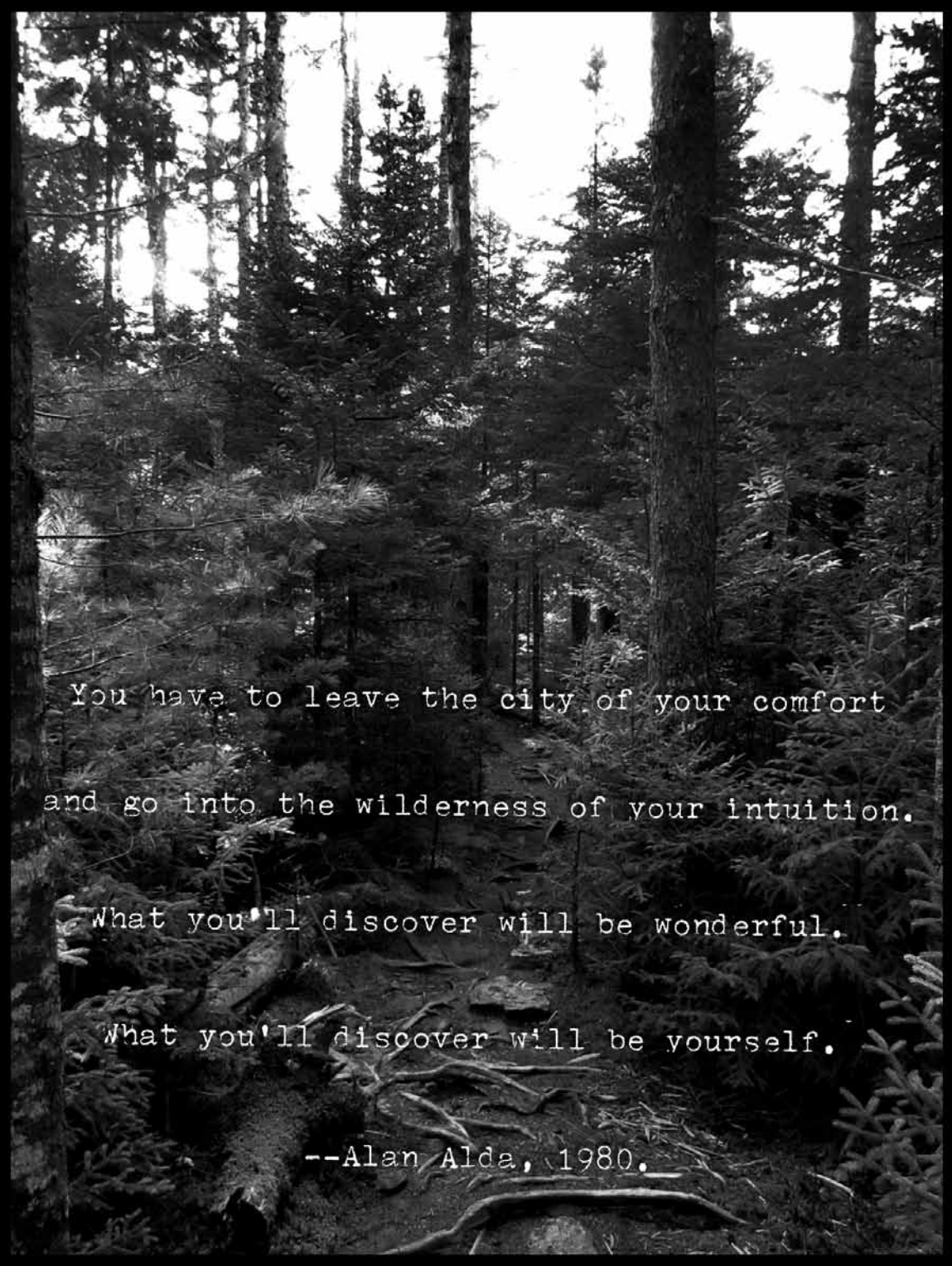
The Cenacle

"Lying at risk is jumping off the cliff and building your wings on the way down."
Ray Bradbury

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."
Robert Frost

"You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover is yourself."
Alan Alda

Number 110 | December 2019

A black and white photograph of a dense forest. Tall, slender trees with dark trunks stand vertically, their branches and leaves creating a canopy overhead. Sunlight filters through the trees, casting dappled light on the forest floor. The ground is covered with a thick layer of ferns, moss, and fallen branches. A narrow, winding path leads through the forest, disappearing into the distance. The overall atmosphere is quiet and mysterious.

You have to leave the city of your comfort
and go into the wilderness of your intuition.

What you'll discover will be wonderful.

What you'll discover will be yourself.

--Alan Alda, 1980.

December 23, 2019

6:44 p.m.

Hood Park Building

lobby near North

Entrance-

Boston, MA.

- I worked in this building from 2012 until 2019, till I was suddenly laid off in July, for no good reason at all - that was July 24 - I came back a week later to return things & pick up things - I fell down, the back entrance metal stair - damaged my glasses, banged up my face - an Uber driver kindly ferried me home & KD took care of the rest.

It's nearly 5 months later & I'm employed again, a contract but with the hope of full-time in 2020 - I'm here because my beloved bicycle, Sparrow X, needed major repairs taken care of by Broadway Bike Shop in Cambridge & Royal Bikes in Needham. I say those names with affection for their kindness & good craftsmanship.

BROADWAY BICYCLE SCHOOL 351 Broadway Cambridge, Ma 02139 United States 617-868-3392 Sales Receipt 12/23/2019 5:28 pm Ticket: 220000130175 Register: Register 1 Employee: James	There is a separate work order for the labor to strip the frame. (#32315) The parts should be in a box with a label with this work order. The bearings of the headset will most likely need to be replaced, added them to workorder. All the cables will need to be replaced as well, keep the housing. - ER (11/22)	shape, cleaned & regreased. in general as a headset wears the cups & races also wear along with the bearings so replacing just the bearings will not improve it. once it is worn its best to replace the entire headset, & I do not recommend replacing it at this time. - ER ***THERE ARE 2 SEPARATE WORK ORDERS FOR THIS ENTIRE JOB, MAKE SURE TO COMPLETE BOTH OF THEM AT PICKUP***	NOTE - before stripping bike we attempted to reverse drill out the bolts but bolts appear to be hardened steel and our reverse drill bits were not hard enough to penetrate center of bolt. If it's possible to reverse drill out bolts specialty tools are needed and even with these it is unlikely that bolts can be drilled out due to the pervasiveness of the corrosion. Either way a frame builder is needed although we do not recommend investing in this.
Customer said it was a slow leak. Pumped front tire at est, check pressure during service. If needed replace tube Double check front fender stays as cus't said they bumped it and it is come loose/out. notes service JD 11/22 rear flat caused by mr tuffy, reinstalled with new tube/tires	NOTE - before stripping bike we attempted to reverse drill out the bolts but bolts appear to be hardened steel and our drill out bolts specialty tools are needed and even with these it is unlikely that bolts can be drilled out due to the pervasiveness of the corrosion. Either way a frame builder is needed although we do not recommend investing in this frame. - KM (11/22)	Custom Bike Build - Frame Parts Purchased Elsewhere Accessories like fenders, rack not included)* Full Frame Saver* 12/17 Free Ride* Email/text	*Wheels are in kitchen. We can't hold on to these and all other parts for the re-assemble *All other parts in blue bucket in used room. *Driveside rack bolt head snapped off due to corrosion. We will need to use a p-clamp as best as possible to attach rack at re-assemble unless cus't would also like frame builder to replace this braze on during service. *The customer has a receipt.
put tube on workorder, old u brake and bolt heads on bars, leaving new u brake in SO for now Cus't emailed back asking to stripped frame bare in order for them to bring it to the frame builder. Called cus't to advise cus't to not do the work as the frame is intensively corroded and there is a very high risk that the structural integrity of the frame is compromised. In addition,	Notes from frame stripping 11/25 - KM	Tech Hombre AD996TW Front or Rear Black U-Brake 1.5-1.75 Schrader Tube Brake Cable (\$3 cable only) Shift/Derailleur Cable Only Work order #32315, Item: Road TB Silver This is a bike that has bolts seized in the rear brake stud. It is being stripped to bring to	The items listed below are not eligible for return: New Bikes Helmets Used Bikes Used Parts Thank You Raymond Souland!



-4-

My path back to Milwaukee wended by here; well, enough, so for me to be tempted to stop there. This building, the work I did here so many years for PHT Corp, & its successors, meant so much to me & D. We could afford to buy a house, Pumpalow Lee. While here, I learned so much about how to be a technical writer, what wide an array of work it could be, how I could help others as I got better.

Some years ago, partway through my time here, I was in this lobby, a fair walk from my third floor desk. The CEO of PHT, Phil Lee, was leaving the company as it had been purchased by another company. Now, this lobby has all about it the offices & classrooms of a college that moved in. Then, it was just a recently renovated shell, waiting tenants.

An event to mark Phil's time at PHT, thank him, raise a toast to years of good work.

I could not have imagined that

-5-

day that I would be sitting here, years later, laid off by PHT's successor, at a new job. Time came & gone. PHT was a startup tech company, small, tight-knit, a family. Near 20 years like that. It came in near the end.

I don't remember many of the faces from that day. And I didn't know them so well even then. Never socialized with anyone, nor even went to the holiday party. I was here to work & that's my way. Wish I'd done a little more.

I don't work here anymore, & my time here will fade day by day. I don't know what it means if it could end so suddenly.

Do we grow as human beings? Can we get better? Can experiences good & bad affect our steps forward, our thoughts & our decisions?

I'm different than I was 7 years ago, when I came here. Even when I left here 5 months ago.

At least I think I am. I doubt I'll be back again soon.

-15-

December 24, 2019
9:59 p.m.
Harvard Square -
Wholesome Fresh
Market - table -
Cambridge, MA.

- Like 5 months ago, I left that building & moved on. The many months of job hunting & finding that allowed me to return in a calmer & more contemplative head.

I wanted to say something else here about that stretch of months, this time not about me so very much.

The dubiously elected U.S. president, Donald J. Trump, was impeached by the House of Representatives earlier this month. Having stolen the 2016 election, & seemingly gotten away with it, he doubled down & tried to steal next year's too. And blocked legal efforts to investigate this.

He faces a trial now in the U.S. Senate, in early 2020, one he believes he will emerge as victor of.



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found innocent. And it is doubtful that 67 senators will vote to remove him. It's never happened in American history.

Trump won the presidency by very strange circumstances. Collusion with Russia. Appearing to the Janitors of the country as though he understood them, would help their plight. Many still cling to that delusion, perhaps because it felt good to be seen by a powerful & rich man.

Once elected, Trump tried to reinvent the office as like to a CEO of a company, what he understood. Destroy the competition (the press, Democrats); crush the weak & flush them away (immigrants, minorities, the poor); consolidate power by re-writing the laws of the land to his own liking (why the Senate's only other business than impeachments these days is to confirm Trump-friendly federal judges).

The press & the Democrats are not competition, nor enemies. Immigrants & minorities & the poor are not weak. More importantly, none of these

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are stupid. What will Trump promise in 2020 that anyone would believe? How easily will the hatred & racism & cruelty of his years in office be ignored or dismissed?

The Senate may give Trump a pass. But it's very unlikely millions of people voting next year will. While a minority of racists, fools, & others may cling to whatever vague simulacra of Donald Trump they voted for in 2016, ~~most~~ ~~with~~ many will either stay home or wake the fuck up.

If conviction for his crimes will not remove him from office, just think of how many angry people will find their way to the voting booth next November, fully informed that Donald J. Trump did not give a fuck for earning their votes honestly. Knew he couldn't.

Don't take it for granted, though, any of you reading this. If you agree with me, then make sure to vote. And bring every friend you can.

12/24/2019 Cambridge Mass. CA



Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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- Burning Man Books #1-72
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Thank you to my new employer(s) for bringing me on, for making me feel welcomed, & for valuing me as a colleague & as a person. I will do my best not to let you down.



SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2019

Feedback on Cenacle 109 | October 2019

From Colin James:

John Echem's "Osanana" is a beautiful poem. His expert use of space leads us in. His phrase "rifle eye of the sun" recalls to me the great American poet Raphael Rudnick. His poem wastes nothing and throws nothing away.

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I was enchanted by John Echem's sophisticated vapor of color, space, time, and emotion in "Osanana." He can say more with fewer words than most poets I know of, and his poetry drills itself into your soul in a way that is unique and overpowering. His lonely cactus growing glacially on "the wasteland spine of afterlife" should be a resonant reminder to us all of the frailty of life, nature, and even the promise of God.

We may live in a realm of "shape without form and shade without color" (as T.S. Eliot reminds us elsewhere), but Echem gives form to the shape and color to the shade, purging us of the illusion of sanctity, while constructing his own edifice of the sacred. *Well done.*

* * * * *

From John Echem:

Joe Ciccone's poem "Riding With My Wife In An Old Willys"—with its strange twist of ascetic tone and happy-go-lucky mood—takes a careening trip through my mind. Ciccone vividly illustrates his journey on the "old beach road" of life through a "fast forward world." His sweeping, panoptic vision purifies and encourages me *to be me*, to focus on *my path* as I journey through this life. If I had a wish, I'd love to listen to him read this poem in his own voice.

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

Joe Ciccone's "Riding With My Wife In An Old Willys" reminds me of an old story. When I first came to Israel, the *Villis* was a car referred to with reverent nostalgia wherever I went. So, here, now, I'm ready to ride in Joe's poem. I'm right there the whole time—with "one gear left" and "passed by mopeds." Yes, I hear the engine, I see Adonis and joke along with the passengers. And best, I truly believe we'll be shown the secret haven of flowers. Even as the pearl melts. *Love this poem.*

Reading this issue's excerpt from Tamara Miles' memoir *Same Moon Shining*, I feel a powerful emotional tie to the lines: "I have been coating my father with flesh in these pages, have made him a real boy, have heard in him bassoon and drums, his own discordant song." What a wonderful rich description that leaves me to *pause*, to *listen*, to *hear his song*.

Martina Newberry's powerful voice shows up when her name is called. How I see it all—"silky voices of Latinos / the beautiful brown of their hands will treat the fruit with gentle guidance into paper containers"—even as I am 10,000 miles away from this place where persimmons would prefer to be treated by those tender hands.

John Echem's "Osanana" sings to me of a "Nest of crows / their hard *oof!* / Cries close on the adze of / silence / pale rendition of aria." I land in a reverie of the marvelous tones of these sounds and images.

Arriving near the back pages to Raymond Soulard Jr.'s new fixtion, *Labyrinthine*. Its flow, from Beatles to graffiti-art-print to promises and sudden landings of memories. I travel through with a near-joy of knowing that Lisa Bieberman's LSD manual (*Session Games People Play*) comes before this section—both for reference. Both offering life's wisdom for the moment that I'm able to recruit my attention and learn.

* * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

There is a particularly striking phrase in Raymond Soulard Jr.'s *From Soulard's Notebooks*. He writes: "Human life is not long enough to know very much." This feels so true to me—compelling and, in a way, comforting. Warming to think that I'm not just lacking in intelligence, and/or perception, but it is only that my life is too short for me to understand everything I want so badly to understand.

Charlie Beyer's "The Crocodile King of Belize" continues to fascinate me. Each chapter is a gem. I love going back to past issues to remind myself about those episodes before I start the next.

Joe Ciccone's "Riding With My Wife In An Old Willys" is such a lovely poem! I have gone back to it again and again to relive its palpable tenderness.

The excerpts from Ace Boggess's novel *States of Mercy* makes me itchy to have the entire novel in my hands. The last paragraph of these several excerpts: knocked the breath out of me:

At last, we were sure nothing had changed. The sun would still rise as always over people racing their cars along the highway, houses where old women were tucked away under their electric blankets, lonely men walking their dogs without ambition, and all the general this and that of a day in the life of America. Nothing changed. Nothing except the calendar and a few expectations. All the rest was as it had been, except without excitement and dread from the months before.

Sam Knot's poet's journal "To do" gave me so much to think about, taught me so much about this learning how to write, then how to edit poems. His lines: "It's nice then to have something to return to—an initial outpouring"—I'll be returning to this lesson in how to approach my own work.

I consistently fall in love with each and every haiku by Judih Haggai. She never fails to make me take in a sharp breath, open my third eye, say: "I wish I'd written that."

Just when I thought I was going to stop reading and get some sleep, Nathan D. Horowitz's "Guapulo" grabbed me. I couldn't stop reading. *Bravo, Nathan!* Thank you! I almost forgive you for keeping me up most of the night!

* * * * *

From Ace Boggess:

Martina Newberry's poem "Typical" overflows with its simple Zen. I felt I easily could relate to it, the stillness of it, the searching of it. This poem captures not only a moment but a mindset. That's a hard combination to master, and Newberry does it with such seeming ease. I wanted to rest in this poem, and just hang out there to see what comes next.

* * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

From Sam Knot's poet's journal we learn of the vitality of a living mythology in Celtic France: the reality of Faeryworld.

Judih Haggai offers northern Israel desert haiku, as austere as helium, and as light.

Tamara Miles' memoir *Same Moon Shining* is deep and comfy like a deep dive in a little submarine into the benthic zone. *Google Street View* evoking excitement and stories. The line about being a fifty-year-old woman wanting to have had a dad who kept her safe in the swimming pool. There's so much going on in this piece and the writing hones in on it like a laser.

* * * * *

From Tom Sheehan:

"*Raymond*: Glad you're back to work, and loved the detailed account of your lay-off, which was quite distinctive in approach. I loved the read, felt the loss and the misery, and the anger. Been through that too. Left one job as going nowhere—interviewed at Raytheon, was not encouraged,

turned around to walk out—and was hailed from his office by a Boston College classmate who had me hired that day—for 26 or 27 years.”

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

I sadly enjoyed Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s jaunt through the vagaries of American hiring politics in his *Notes from New England* “Job Hunting Journal.” It strikes of a mad dash through No-Man's-Land, WWI bullets flying, poisonous gas, relief of getting back to the safety of a slithery trench. *When will this war for a piddling paycheck end?* I love the reality of this piece, the honesty, the moxie to get out the door again, the intelligent replies to unintelligent people.

For the next interview: put your feet on the table, eat a large sandwich slowly. Check your watch obviously, and ask: “How long is this gonna take?” They will see you as management material, and hire you instantly.

* * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

One of the most compelling pieces of work in this issue is Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s “Job Hunting Journal.” Too often we avoid talking about our spells of unemployment, and the agony of waiting for something new—the intense self-examination, worry, and obsession over getting work. On the other hand, there are moments of clarity and victory during such a search. When Raymond wrote to one company about a disappointing interview and outcome, he received a meaningful response. True communication occurred. As a whole, the piece gave me insight and courage to try a whole different approach to job-hunting in the future.

When this piece is read back to back with scenes from Charlie Beyer's “The Crocodile King of Belize,” the job hunt chronicle becomes even more revealing. Consider this scene in which JC encounters a group of Mayans:

“He's already made it clear to them that he's not hiring any of the lazy scum. They do not know how to do the most basic things. All they can do is chop vegetation, chop and chop. Well, everything is chopped, so he has no need for their lazy efforts. ‘What do you want!’ bellows JC. He makes no attempt to be polite, as he knows that these people are here because they want something. The Mayans are not big talkers. They just look at the ground and shuffle their feet. ‘Well, what is it? What are you doing here? I have no work, and I wouldn't give it to you lazy fools anyway if I did have it,’ declares JC. With what seems a great effort, one of the men raises his head to look up at the towering white man . . . ”

In each piece, we find the suppositions, the guessing games, the power play that occur when one party has power over the other . . .

And then there's this brief poem from Judith Haggai that says it all somehow about how it feels to be a seeker, whether for jobs, or spiritual salvation, or love:

*dream catcher
empty pockets
ready and waiting*

* * * * *

From Sam Knot:

Re: Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s Many Musics:

*I know, I have known
In you, I have known
The delicate web of poetry
Warpspeed of thought
The same river written
One side of the butterfly's
Wings, things that lift
Bodies to fall
Like they are meant to
Not be things at all
Ink & pencil
Changes are traced
In paths that depart
& turn about face
To restate themselves*

*In the same words
other ways*

* * *

For Joe Ciccone, riding with his wife in an old
Willys . . .

*The aged perfection of fools
Wisdom deteriorated grace
Everlove undeterred—
Not turning the eyes from
Explanations others might give
Nor turning to—straight down
The old track to the beach—
Nothing precarious in the bubbles
Who turn the waves white—
Who the white waves turn to speak
—gravel-throated shells shush-full*

* * *

For John Echem, & thee muse . . .

*Hosanna, osanana
Music of how
Friendship grows*

*Young shoots
On windowsills
Eating up the bullets of the sun*

*Who was a child
Before time stung
The wasp in the garden*

*Little man
In his giant
Black & yellow spacesuit*

*The She Great
Cartoon machine
Who imagination continues*

*Dramatic battles
Where continental
Dinner plates clash*

*And the evergreen reality
Overspills like fur
Around the whole
Polar crown
Sweating
Equatorial clown*

*And the quiet
Oceanic party
Continues to drift*

*Rolling stone words
Away from
The bleached dragon
Towards
The cave mouth
Hungry hippos*

*Who the light
Cannot turn out
Osanana, gloria*

Hosanna in excelsis!

* * *

For Colin James . . .
entertainer of stray naturalists . . .

*Did I make some moth-steak, or? was?
This night the sun
-set up to stop us in our tracks—by which
I mean the ring
-master had painted a lion
-ess in her long cancan hair
High-kicking toward us with her magic
Spraycan painting her face
So her tongue poked out
A baboon's bum, & drew
Behind the moon an eerie coterie
Of clockwork caterpillars.
Long have I wondered how such
Effects were achieved wherein
My ribcage cocoon became
!THE VIKING BOAT PHEONIX BUTTERFLY!
Part of the show. My very own
Animated circi of atoms
Spelling out "C E L L S"
Like synchronised swimmers*

*!IN MY BLACK SILK PARACHUTE SEA!
& all before dinner, dear me!*

Seriously—thanks for that, Colin James! Your poem “The Entertainer of Stray Naturalists” was pure fun & profoundly satisfying. Weirdly enough, had been browsing some nonsense poetry last night—and then your poem just danced right off the page this morning!

* * *

Editor’s Note: The final version of Sam Knot’s poem “To do.” is featured on page 48 of this issue.

* * * * *





From the ElectroLounge Forums

Post a Poem You Like! (Part 2)

Published on electrolounge.boards.net.

Post by Judih on Nov 1, 2018 at 12:00am

I love this poem! (I hear such a New York accent)

No Problem Party Poem

by Diane Di Prima

first glass broken on patio no problem
 forgotten sour cream for vegetable no problem
 Lewis MacAdam's tough lower jaw no problem
 cops arriving to watch bellydancer no problem
 plastic bags of melted ice no problem
 wine on antique tablecloth no problem
 scratchy stereo no problem
 neighbor's dog no problem
 interviewer from Berkeley Barb no problem
 absence of more beer no problem
 too little dope no problem
 leering Naropans no problem
 cigarette butts on the altars no problem
 Marilyn vomiting in planter box no problem
 Phoebe renouncing love no problem
 Lewis renouncing Phoebe no problem
 hungry ghosts no problem
 absence of children no problem
 heat no problem
 dark no problem
 arnica scattered in nylon rug no problem
 ashes in bowl of bleached bone and Juniper berries no problem
 lost Satie tape no problem
 loss of temper no problem
 arrogance no problem
 boxes of empty beer cans & wine bottles no problem
 thousands of styrofoam cups no problem

Gregory Corso no problem
 Allen Ginsberg no problem
 Diane di Prima no problem
 Anne Waldman's veins no problem
 Dick Gallup's birthday no problem
 Joanne Kyger's peyote & rum no problem wine no problem
 coca-cola no problem
 getting it on in the wet grass no problem
 running out of toilet paper no problem
 decimation of pennyroyal no problem
 destruction of hair clasp no problem
 paranoia no problem
 claustrophobia no problem
 growing up on Brooklyn streets no problem
 growing up in Tibet no problem
 growing up in Chicano Texas no problem
 bellydancing certainly no problem
 figuring it all out no problem
 giving it all up no problem
 giving it all away no problem
 devouring everything in sight no problem.
 what else in Allen's refrigerator?
 what else in Anne's cupboard?
 what do you know that you
 haven't told me yet?
 No problem. No problem. No problem.
 staying another day no problem
 getting out of town no problem
 telling the truth, almost no problem
 easy to stay awake
 easy to go to sleep
 easy to sing the blues
 easy to chant sutras
 what's all the fuss about?
 it decomposes—no problem
 we pack it in boxes—no problem
 we swallow it with water, lock it in the trunk,
 make a quick getaway. NO PROBLEM.

* * *

Post by Nathan on Nov 1, 2018 at 2:42pm

Love it. Thanks for posting.

* * *

Post by Nathan on Jan 23, 2019 at 8:59am

[Untitled]

by Ursula K. LeGuin

What do they do,
the singers, tale-writers, dancers, painters, shapers, makers?
They go there with empty hands,
into the gap between.
They come back with things in their hands.
They go silent and come back with words, with tunes.
They go into confusion and come back with patterns.
They go limping and weeping, ugly and frightened,
and come back with the wings of the redtail hawk,
the eyes of the mountain lion.

That is where they live,
where they get their breath:
there, in the gap between,
the empty place.

Where do the mysterious artists live?
There, in the gap between.
Their hands are the hinge.
No one else can breathe there.
They are beyond praise.

The ordinary artists
use patience, passion, skill, work
and returning to work, judgment,
proportion, intellect, purpose,
indifference, obstinacy, delight in tools,
delight, and with these as their way
they approach the gap, the hub,
approaching in circles, in gyres,
like the buzzard, looking down, watching,
like the coyote, watching.

They look to the center,
 they turn on the center,
 they describe the center,
 though they cannot live there.
 They deserve praise.

There are people who call themselves artists
 who compete with each other for praise.
 They think the center
 is a stuffed gut,
 and that shitting is working.
 They are what the buzzard and the coyote
 ate for breakfast yesterday.

* * *

Post by Judih on Jan 23, 2019 at 1:32pm

Thanks, Nathan. so beautiful. Saluting her brilliance.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Jan 24, 2019 at 7:25am

Haha, clever. Shamefully, and weirdly, true.

* * *

Post by KD on Jan 26, 2019 at 12:27pm

Wow, I really like that Ursula LeGuin poem. Thank you, Nathan!

This isn't exactly a poem, but I think it could be argued that most of Terry Tempest Williams's writing can be called prose poetry:

From **Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert**
 by Terry Tempest Williams

I want my life to be a celebration of slowness.

Walking through the sage from our front door, I am gradually drawn into the well-worn paths of deer. They lead me to Round Mountain and the bloodred side canyons below Castle Rock. Sometimes I see them, but often I don't. Deer are quiet creatures, who, when left to their own nature, move slowly. Their large black eyes absorb all shadows, especially the flash of predators. And their ears catch each word spoken. But today they walk ahead with their halting prance,

one leg raised, then another, and allow me to follow them. I am learning how to not provoke fear and flight among deer. We move into a pink, sandy wash, their black-tipped tails like eagle feathers. I lose sight of them as they disappear around the bend.

On the top of the ridge I can see for miles Inside this erosional landscape where all colors eventually bleed into the river, it is hard to desire anything but time and space.

Time and space. In the desert there is space. Space is the twin sister of time. If we have open space then we have open time to breathe, to dream, to dare, to play, to pray to move freely, so freely, in a world our minds have forgotten but our bodies remember. Time and space. This partnership is holy. In these redrock canyons, time creates space—an arch, an eye, this blue eye of sky. We remember why we love the desert; it is our tactile response to light, to silence, and to stillness.

Hand on stone—patience.

Hand on water—music.

* * *

Post by Tamaramilessc on Jul 28, 2019 at 7:01am

The Scarecrow

By Kahlil Gibran

Once I said to a scarecrow, “You must be tired of standing in this lonely field.”

And he said, “The joy of scaring is a deep and lasting one, and I never tire of it.”

Said I, after a minute of thought, “It is true; for I too have known that joy.”

Said he, “Only those who are stuffed with straw can know it.”

Then I left him, not knowing whether he had complimented or belittled me.

A year passed, during which the scarecrow turned philosopher.

And when I passed by him again I saw two crows building a nest under his hat.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Aug 2, 2019 at 10:31am

This one will linger with me. Thank you.

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Dec 7, 2019 at 6:08pm

Siphonaptera

by Augustus De Morgan

Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em;
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum.
And the great fleas themselves, in turn, have greater fleas to go on;
While these again have greater still, and greater still, and so on.

* * *

Post by Judih on Dec 7, 2019 at 10:45pm

Ha, lovely, Jimmy!

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."*

—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

lx. Unitive

*"This can't go on forever
This war in a ring
Gotta bring us together
Like beads on one string"*

—The Who, 2019.

i.

Remember some things, & better,
& different, deeper cool beneath,
warmer flesh to their images & noise.
It's what I've returned to this Island
to do, re-braid my many selves, light up
& fuse old gaps with new sparks.
Grasp fuller the strange girl in me,
grasp & go, hereon. Better.

I've lived long times at the Pensionne,
tended its wild Garden, learning it,
teaching me. Apprenticed to the White Tiger,
his kindly Sea-blue eyes, growling wisdom
in touching his black-striped fur,
its beautiful calm, sweet music, like a
veil of stars round my raw yearning heart.
I stopped running from my lost home,
the King my father, my dear friends
in dreams, my many kinds of loves.

When dreams came again, as so long
 they hadn't, they were of this Island,
 & the Architect asking me to return,
 to *find him in the Tangled Gate*.
 My body asweat in these dreams,
 warm again to those old wants, yearns
 of my hips & breasts, hands & lips.

*To tame him, to burn him, to drown him,
 in me, deep in me, to save him
 atwist my limbs, mine, beg me, beg me,
 love me, mine own.*

Yet we argued. Hearts like fists. Dreams or not.
 "Why now?"
 "You're needed."
 "You wouldn't let me in the Gate
 by waking, when I lived there.
 When you were my master."
 "You traveled to the Gate anyway.
 Many times. I knew."
 "What did you know?"

His face plain upon me, his spectral
 grey eyes within mine own, touching me
 in ways mine own damp hands could not,
 possessing me within mine hardest breaths,
 shaping me up as like a poem from
 a mound of moss.

"I knew then, I know now, that the
 deepest truths of the human heart
 are made of its yearns. I forbade you
 travel in the Tangled Gate but gave
 you maps to study, my telescope to peer it
 by. So you traveled it by dreams
 to know it as few ever have, & these
 passing years have bound you still
 deeper the Gate by absence & wish."

"And now you urge my return?"
 "Ask your White Tiger."

I never find him but he is before me,
 head sunk low for an embrace.
 Always the Garden, I've never seen him
 elsewhere, nor enter it, nor exit.

Not my master, Creatures never are,
 but a teacher, my *tender*. He taught me
 simple & best what I most needed to know:
kindness most binds.

When I resisted the farthest ends
 of his teachings, when kindness seemed
 a second to self-preservation, or revenge,
 he insisted me. A shake of his mane,
 a correcting growl. Pressed me again & again.

Kindness most binds. Many ways to heal.
 He would not deny me my dreams of
 the Architect, nor nudge me along,
 nor tug me back.

"I have to go back, don't I? Leave here?"
 Quiet growling deep in his throat.

Kindness most binds. Many ways to heal.
Learning is about making better choices.
 We clustered together in the Garden,
 in full moonlight.
 "Come with me." Only silence.
 By morning our last embrace till the next one.

ii.

My travels since have brought me
 to this road, to an obscured understanding
 of what I am. My heart's strange yearns
 wrapped in an endless veil of stars.
 Not knowing how to know where I begin
 or end in space & time.

We approach a kind of temple now,
 seeming cut into a cave, I'm unsure to see.
 The crowd easy lets me press forward,
 like *expecting me, waiting me, wanting me.*



A tall, feathered hierophant faces me.
There is silence. *Does he wish words?*

"I wish nothing." His words like a bow.

"Will I find my answers in there?"
Shakes his head. Another kind of bow.
Like I wondered him the color of mine own eyes.

He steps aside, & I walk toward
the entrance, dark as its own shadow.
There is a stone basin of water, insisting
a drink, like the Fountain, somewhere
back there. I nod. Splash, drink.
Enter, unknowing if I will return.

For a moment, still blind blackness,
shadow's shadows, nor even the feel
of the ground beneath my feet.

I breathe slower, do not cry out,
hmmm a little to calm, perhaps invite.
Something tests me here.

I reach within me, strange girl's
strange heart, nudge more my
hmmmming, sniff a little too for any clue.
Images emerge & hang about me.

I see the book of patterns my father
the King & I would study close together
by evening, contriving deeper ways into
my dances at first light, & their
waking songs of dream. I studied
with him, dreamed my own dreams,
danced for him, wondered whatever
could he learn from a strange girl's
nude whirlings at dawn.

What was this book we studied so?

I reach out to touch it, turn its
frail pages, & now there is something
here I know. *These are gnatterings*
rudely writ! My friend the Imp's
playful ur-tongue, yet wisps of words
wrap around my fingers, like "*there is*
no final thing to know," now tickle up
to my brow, & now lay soft upon my head,
a crown of vines & stones, clue & thread.

iii.

The braided thread now comes near to me, &
I follow, & a half turn, & there my beloved
brother, finding me disconsolate that I would
not see my friends again, listening
to me tell of their world in dreaming caverns
& tunnels underneath the Tangled Gate.
Never a denying word, just this: "You will limp
now as I sometimes do, but not always.
You will find each other again."

Another half turn, & there now my friend
who claimed my father the King's heart,
made off like a preying bandit. I see them
together in the chamber they alone used.
Her straddling him, dark hair down, hips moving
impossibly slow, head reared back in snarl,
growling wide as forever as she sucks him into her,
deep in, till nothing seems to remain, & now
leaving their chamber, still nude, him sweating
up from the blood trashing her walk along
the empty corridor, him old splayed remains, &
her gone completely. *My lost father.*

I press myself harder deep in this darkness,
 command now to know, & find I am small,
 hardly yet made, singing to rags & flower vases
because they sing to me, we are alike.
 I try to recall earlier but it's like I was
 never born, never an infant. Created
 like a poem from moss, no couple loved me to be.
 The King *not* my father, nor his dead first
 Queen my mother? *Why do I know this is true?*
Why have I always known?

I tire. What do I do here?

There are wisps of song, of a kind with
 my despairing, like my dear Singer
 of childly yore. I reach toward them &
 they settle like a hummingbird on my
 outstretched finger.

Singing, "*Many kinds of time, several
 binds of time, & how it looses to the air!*"
 I think of my Architect, & the singing
 molds his face in the dark before me.

iv.

"You've come."
 "You've led."

I feel soft pressings against my arms
 & shoulders. My friends! Soft fur of the
 White Bunny, tiny gnattering Imp, turtle
 not a turtle. *So close to me again.*
Heartbeat. Breath. Touch. Humming.

We linger together, me & the Architect
 & these lovely Creatures. Like this
 possible? Like together we could learn
 to learn to know each other?

They love him too now, because they
 have learned him, brought him here
 to me. *Kindness most binds*. Like all
 my friends & teachers with me
 in this strange & crucial moment.
 Like by my love for each & all of them
 will I decide what next.

v.

I drift from my friends, wander
 memories that seem more departing.
 The sweet, high music of the Traveling Troubadour.
 The dark fanciful music of the One Woods
 when all wake deep in the night & sing out.

My father the King on sleepless nights,
 his spyglass peering the black water.
 His demon tugging him back, away from me,
 away from the Queen, willing to sacrifice
 my brother, the snakebite in his heart never
 letting him rest until our Island home abandoned,
 & all to war. Never knowing what she is,
 or what I am, or all this we lost.

My Blue Suitcase. The box of many threads.
 I begin to fear. *What do I know to do?*
 I twist in, & in, & in, feel myself somehow
 starting to pull this world closed upon
 itself, its possibilities, even as glints &
 glarings of a new one nose me near.

I fear. Words are leaving me.
No! (leaving) *No!* (leaving)
 I try to cry out *help me!*
 but it's just a silent wordless grunt.
No! (leaving)

Try again. This world shaking from me to its
 every corner, so many I have not known,
 & all upon feel failure & pain in their blood & bones.

No! (leaving) *No!* (leaving) *N-!* (leav-) *N-!*
(gnatter) *(N!)* *(gnatter! gnatter!)*

*No! Help me, my Architect! My friends! Beast!
 Hero! My brother! My father! Help me!
 White Tiger! Singer! Troubadour!
 Help me! (No!) (gnatter! gnatter!)
 Help me, Queen! Help me, all!*

A great roar, a wild pain, I feel blown
 all to light, cry out soundlessly, & then
 all silence. Silence.

Then a voice, my own, & yet I listen:
*"There is a door, & now we pass through.
 There is a door. And now we pass through!"*

vi.

The world spasms. The world shakes.
 The world holds. I reach into its maw
 & fill it with everything I've ever learned,
 ever known, ever loved.

I bind myself to this world, its flaws,
 its beauties. I push time back, smooth it
 like a warm blanket along across a long, bare back.
 It is there for those not yet ready to reveal
 themselves to the night, & its many kinds of truths.

I push back, growing stronger, healing all I can,
 there is so much, & the world will ever root up
 from its countless fractures,
 how they chorus.

My efforts tire me, yet now I feel my friends
 join me, cluster me close, lift me up in
 our *hmmmming*, help me push open again
 this world, *keep this world*, arriving,
now arriving, close, closer, more, & more,
 & a push, & now it's . . . water. *Sea water!*
My beautiful world's Wide Wide Sea!



I am in mid-dive into the Sea, my Blue
 Suitcase tied from my waist,
 bidding my friend goodbye with a wave,
it is the Hero, my dear friend, smiling
 at me as once I had at him, *thank you*,
I love you, thank you, & goodbye.

The shore is rocky, no beach where I half-
 collapse, breathless. The sea lets me
 leave more willing this time, but will
 guard by my blood hereon.

I have bound myself to this world.
I have remembered some things & bound
myself here.

I will climb the rocks to the Dancing Grounds,
 will dance again on these girl's legs
 I've chosen to keep.

I will let the Castle slow return to green,
 One Woods hungering like a long waiting
 kiss for its possession.

The Tower, by my touch, will be Tree
 & Tower & Starcraft in one, & my Architect
 will have his day & night without end.

Finally, come to the Tangled Gate, that
 which I have loved best is here, always been,
 & not left nor right by the Fountain, but
through, no way *in* but *through*.

The Fountain's luring waters swallowing me
 as I pass into the caves & tunnels
 of my friends, my childly dreams,
 & they will receive me by feather &
 fur & fin, happy sniffs all around.
 Yet still a part of me will draw elsewhere too.

Away, away, deeper & deeper, ever toward &
 arriving finally at the Red Bag.
 And here I will close what has been too
 long been opened, the wound that was
 the loss of our home, long ago, &
 what compelled our travels to the stars,
 in search for a new one to salve us.

I was made to help us heal, but *healing is hereon*.
 Healing is sending those who wish along their
 way, imagining some next perfect world to find.

"There is a door. And now we pass through!"

One by one, till they are seeming gone, till
 perhaps I am all left?

I lead my dear friends up through the tunnels
 to the Cave of the Beast, my friend too,
 lead him now, & his mate, into the paths
 of vines & stones, dancing them all along now,
hmmmming breaks open to singing & shouts,
 till we exit the Gate, & on to the
 Dancing Grounds, where I will no longer
 dance just by myself, & only by dawn.

My childly dreams now awake forever,
unitive, welcoming & inviting to all who
 find these pages.

Listen in your dreams for our singing
 from this Island, its caves, its tunnels,
 its Gate. *Join us in our unitive humming!*

Dance our music through your lone &
 daylight hours. Touch & teach others how,
so close, smiling, so close. *They are real.*



* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

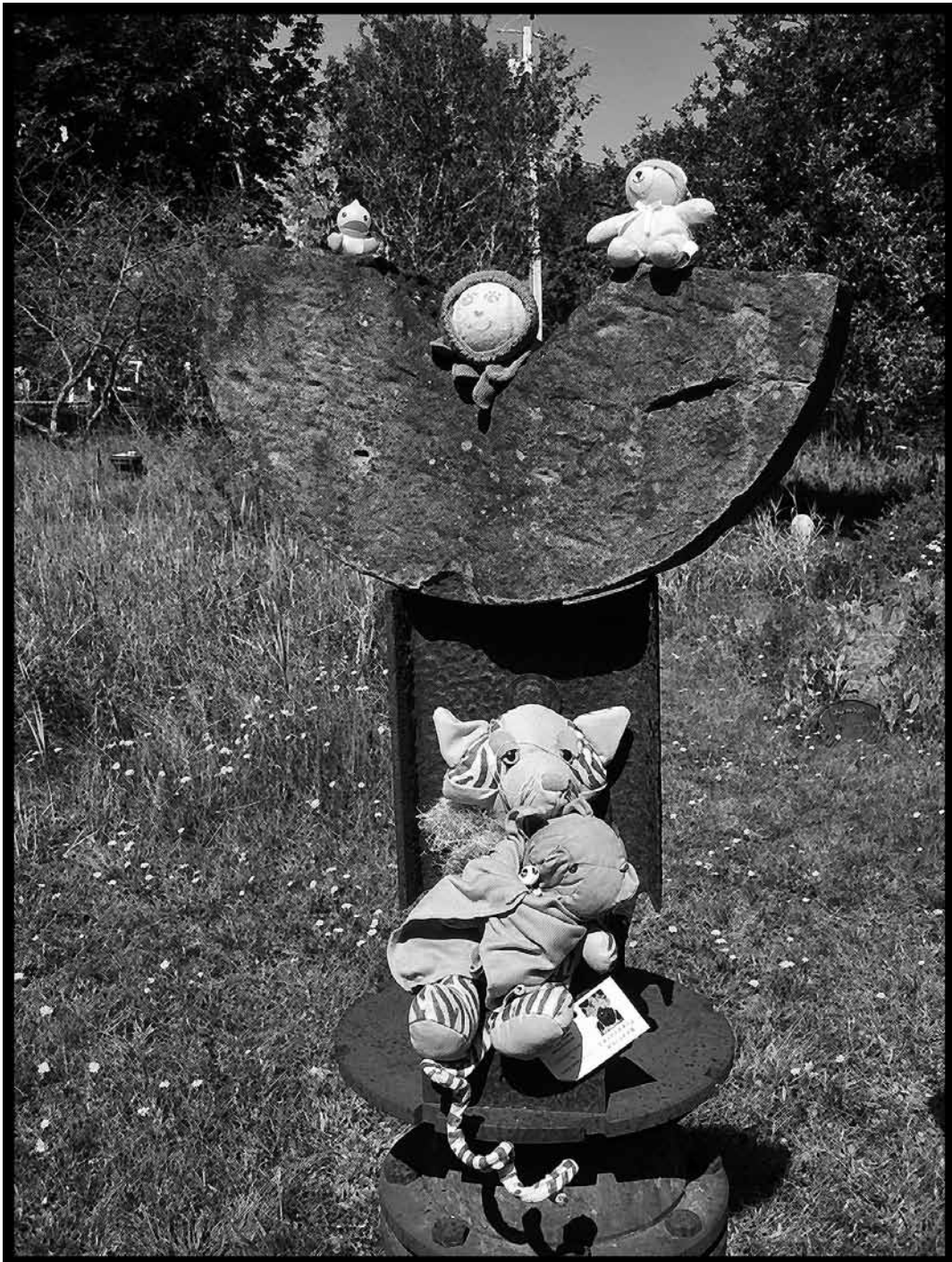
Reflections on Making *The Tangled Gate [Redux]*

December 24, 2019
8:29 p.m.
Harvard Square —
Smith Campus Center
Cambridge, Massachusetts

—I'm sitting at a table in the approximate space where 7 years ago, this month, I wrote "One, Many, None." This was the final poem of my original 36 *Tangled Gate* poems. The table I sat at was near to the entrance of my beloved Au Bon Pain Cafe, which closed in early 2016 (after 32 years in business)—supplanted by Harvard University's Smith Center, which is both student center & public space for all.

I wrote many more *Tangled Gate* poems after that December day (180 as of the new one in this issue), exploring this imaginal world deeper & deeper in all my writings—*Many Musics*, *Labyrinthine*, *Bags End News*, *Dream Raps*, & more. Then, in early 2018, about two years after ABP's doors were shuttered, & some months before Smith Center opened, I started to re-mix the original 36 *TG* poems, to see what they would be like after 7 years of deepening the original myth.

The last of these, "Unitive," was finished 2½ weeks ago at a table in another part of this center, & at a table near to this one (a chess player, one of many who dwell in all seasons about the Square, was perched at this table), & finally in my own office at the Bungalow Cee in Milkrose, some towns away from Cambridge.



Different building now, different pane of glass to look through, & no longer ABP's lovely step-up bricked courtyard to see, but the view of Harvard Square is mostly the same. Stores, holiday lights, traffic, the olde buildings of the University across the street.

I was aflame with those first 36 *TG* poems, written one a day, mostly on buses I rode to work (via Harvard Square)(to the job that laid me off this past July). These poems felt like the culmination of years of working disparate narratives & ideas & characters into a *single something*. Then years reacting to those poems, to the greater expanse I had found with them.

My pace slowed over time, especially when I started into the 36 re-mix poems. My task to write each one new, yet deeply true to the original too. Some of the 36 broke out easily with fresh riches to show; others were stubborn, fought off every novel move I tried with them. Even "Unitive," as my draft published in *Cenacle* | 109 | October 2019 shows, was a battlefield to try to sort through well.

* * * * *

9:04 p.m.

Harvard Square —

Wholesome Fresh Market

Cambridge, Massachusetts

—It being Xmas Eve, all but the bars around here were closed by 9, including Smith Center; all save for this all-night market with a long window ledge & row of chairs. A new place to me, first time come tonight, & a good chance to turn to: *what next?*

Writing 216 *Tangled Gate* poems (so far) has changed my poetry permanently. I think of poetry by my "self" in a different way. I occupy Imaginal Space in a fuller & richer way; it is as real to me as waking space. This so because it involves my mind & affects my thinking as much as waking space does.

So telling its stories, of its characters, mining its histories & themes, is as important to me as performing my new pay job well, loving KD, & others, & navigating best I can the world not Imaginal Space in my mind. I am a dual citizen, of sorts, though I could also say that what I write is about as real as anything else I experience. And real, at least to a degree, to readers of my pages in *The Cenacle*.

So what next? Since I am certainly going to keep exploring the places & characters of *The Tangled Gate*.

I think: *Creatures*. Look far more into what they might be, & their lives & experiences apart from who they think of as "people-folks."

I've never been able to decide what they are. I first began to know them in the Bags End stories

my sister Christine & I would make up about her stuffed animals. Beagle, bunny, leopard, & so on. And a girl I loved when I was a youth, Jennifer, made up stories about her “stuffies” too. What many children, mostly girls, up till maybe the end of high school, do too.

Christine grew up & along her own path. Jennifer found other guys to dote upon her whimsy. I kept the ideas, the gentle innocent fun of it, & kept going. I discovered much kinship in Victorian-era fantasy literature, both British & American. I devoured L. Frank Baum’s *Wizard of Oz* books. A.A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* books, J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books, & others too. They all showed me the breadth & depth possible in building great, grand Imaginal worlds from simple beginnings. A lost girl meets a talking Scarecrow. A Wizard visits a Hobbit with a proposal. A chubby Bear sings songs of his own making, & searches for honey. Four wartime children taking refuge in a countryside manor find a closet with no back wall. And so on.

These books became my models, my teachers. My compass to discover new within my Imaginal Space. Others along the way encouraged & delighted & taught me too. Jim Henson’s TV show *Fraggle Rock*. Stephen King’s *Dark Tower* books. J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* books. C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicle of Narnia*,

What I believe about writing, about Art in general, maybe about any creative life pursuit, is this: if you & this pursuit fit, deep down where it matters, the work of it will be a kind of *play*. Maybe sometimes tiring, frustrating, crazy to try to explain to anyone but, still, *play*. Practicing medicine, raising a garden, becoming a quarterback, or a preacher, or an Artist. *Play*.

To become the Artist I am, to pursue it as I do, I *sniff* like Creatures do, to feel out the world around & within me.

Creatures cluster for warmth, for reassurance. They cluster dream, which I wish I could too.

Creatures move deeply among the 6 or 7 colors of the rainbow. They *hmmm* together for guidance, to bind, to know better. They eat too, but I know few of these foods—rutabega soup, carrots.

They love people-folks, & try always to serve & guide them. But they are *not* people-folks, *nor* are they pets.

They are ancient, & iterative through the world’s history, & yet also sweet & shy & funny.

How can I, with my black pen & paper, but *still a people-folks* (I think), know to tell of them but at a distance?

It’s like I need a translator. *A someone, a something. A somehow.*

No real answers yet to any of this. Finishing “Unitive” has passed me along with its glints of hints of how & why. But I am not there yet.

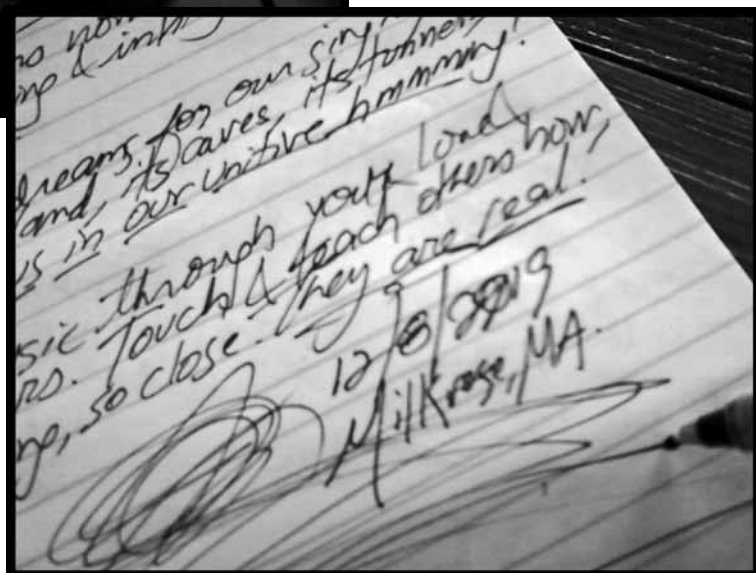
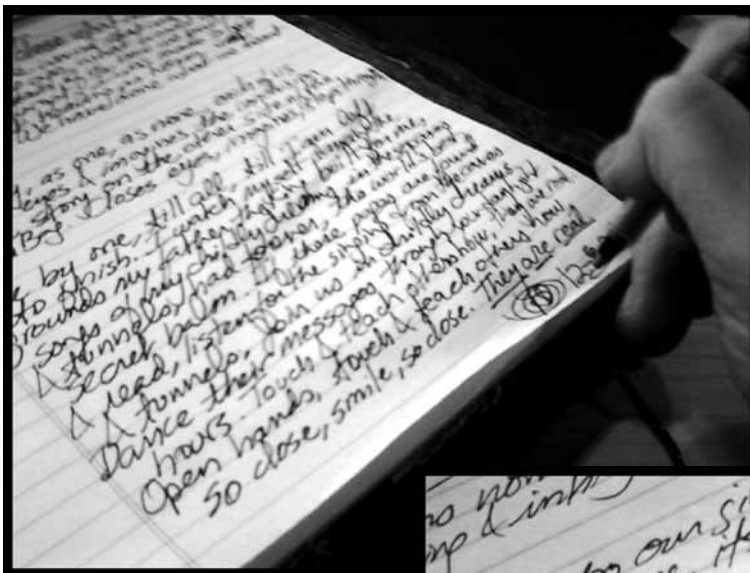
I am not so very close, & so this, then, becomes my new work.

This, then becomes my new *play*.

I cannot wait to discover what next.

12/24/2019
Cambridge, MA.

* * * * *







Those Initials

A well-known someone
 once wrote a poem for me.
 To my delight, it showed up
 in a literary journal of some repute,
 and then in an actual book.
 My initials were there,
 right under the title and following
 the word *for*. I was delighted
 that this fine poet had discovered
 words meant especially for me
 and I hadn't even slept with him,
 or chatted him up flirtatiously.

My friends, I ask you to imagine it:
 a poem for me, who ground away
 at her own poems—hustling
 the hell out of every line,
 always afraid that my lack
 of credentials would become
 oh-so-apparent in my ignorance
 of literary intricacies. I must tell you:
 that poem didn't care one bit
 about my lack of formal education.

It mentioned beauty and had an
 understanding inside it that claimed
 the right to know what beauty is
 and what it is worth. "It doesn't matter
 that you aren't beautiful," my father said.
 "It matters whether or not you are smart."
 He, too, had discovered words just for me.

This all happened years ago. The poem
 with my initials happened 35 years ago.
 When I remember or dream, I forget which,
 it is those initials I see: *for M.D.*
 Those initials are what I believe.

* * *

It Could Be Said

When I read how it was that one million Thai children
gathered at a Buddhist temple to meditate for world peace,
I stopped reading to stay silent and worshipful—
not quite a meditation, but quiet. I am nothing if not respectful of magic.

In that quiet, I thought back to all the spiritual paths I had followed.
When I am gone, I thought, *what can be said about my own meditations and longings?*

It could be said that I looked steadily at what my mind didn't want to see.

It could be said that I celebrated the courage in others that I could not conjure up in myself.

It could be said that I slept and woke in doubt and prayed to gods I did not love
for the beings I did love.

It could be said that I saw each single breath as essential on its own—
and that I looked for the places where overwhelming happiness once lived—
that I sat for a while in those places long enough to celebrate them wildly—
and sometimes without wisdom.

I can say of myself that I have long remembered my teachers, even if I forgot—
albeit briefly—
what they taught (a relentless fault).

When I read how it was that one million Thai children
gathered at a Buddhist temple to meditate for world peace,
I stopped reading and, as you can see, thought only of myself—again.

* * *

Consider This

Once, the diamond-studded darkness
came like a quilt to cover our rest,
to comfort us while we slept.

Once, the sun came up with music,
and poems, and warm breath—
as if, all over the world,
bread was baking.

Once, the beaches and the waves
performed a clean perfect tango—
while hermit crabs watched
from under calcium awnings.

Once, our bones knew of miracles,
and scented secrets to carry us through our days.

Once there were dreams so real
we could not rouse from them,
and the hearts of those we loved
held those dreams for us—
when we thought we'd lost them.

Once, at Morro Bay, I watched
a blue heron fly in from the sea,
and fold herself into her nest
in a towering eucalyptus.

I thought then, and I tell you now that,
for the loneliest of us—
who see the world through the eyes of the heron—
the *once-ness* of all things is never enough.

* * * * *





States of Mercy

[More Excerpts From a Novel]

I slept with her once. It was the most wonderful mistake of my life. She brought a mix of passion and serenity into the bed like the sense one gets while looking at a candle's flame. She burned and soothed and danced. Then she left me exhausted, depraved, sick with want, and hating myself for wanting. Her saying goodbye was like the comedown from a drug for me: a terrible emptiness that brought a sort of nostalgia.

I don't know why we did it. Maybe we were bored. Or maybe she needed something else to experience and put behind her—something like confusion or jealousy or whatever ugly emotion burns in the gut when the love for a friend and that for a soul mate start to overlap.

Sigh. But I don't want to talk about that. It's just an interlude in our story, in *her* story: a moment of pure ecstasy followed by a longer moment filled with doubt and contempt. On either side of those moments, I see only friendship.

It's in friendship I begin. I still love her, I admit, but I love her the way only a friend can love. It's with that love I also say goodbye.

Well, eventually. First I should work my way back to the genesis. How old was I when I first saw her? Twenty-one, I think.

Yes, twenty-one.

I'd transferred from a much bigger university out west because my grades were too low. So here I was back home in Frozen Orange, Pennsylvania, a city I loathed for years in that way one can only despise one's hometown. I'd moved back in with my parents, which made the whole experience that much more painful. I hated the state I was in. I hated being alone, being at home, being human. I needed distractions, and quickly. Trapped in a city my closest friends had fled, I headed out that Friday night at the start of the first summer term, intent on drowning my sorrows in Jack Daniel's and Coke at a local bar.

Most of the other Orange Lake College students were long gone during the summer, back to their homes in Pittsburgh and nearby Erie, or just west to Cleveland. That left Crystal's almost empty tonight, save for a few local drunks who probably preferred the familiarity of other dives on dark winter nights with the younger crowd in town.

Occasionally summer students wandered in and out through the wide glass doors, but mostly they were sober and no more than eighteen or nineteen. Without the crowd to blur their faces, the bartenders could easily guess their age and refuse to serve them. Since none of their friends were around to sneak them drinks, Crystal's didn't suit them. They entered, circled the bar numbly as if on a quest. Some sat alone in corners, pretending to listen while a folk singer played "Dead Flowers."

Others climbed amber stairs to the upper level where no one played pool, no one leaned over the foosball table, and no one was throwing darts. Few stuck around. Most figured it was better to start anew in some other club along the lakeside avenues.

I knew they weren't lucky. And neither was I. No one is ever lucky on a hot summer night in Frozen Orange. Not even Erie's staring blue-black eye brought serenity. An illusion of steam in the air hid the moon, and a brownish gray haze seemed to obscure the dark of night.

It wasn't a good time to be in Crystal's. Even without the crowd, the bar smelled of sweat and an additional sourness, effluvial, which came from underneath the floorboards like a dead and rotting animal. Only half the ceiling fans worked, so the air felt just as thick and hot inside at night as it had outside earlier in the day. Until you got used to it, that air was hard to breathe. My mouth hung half-open as I paid for my drink, thanked the bartender, and joined the flow of other lonely travelers, making my own circuit around the bar.

It's then I saw the one perfect vision I always associate with *her*. In a shaded corner niche directly across from the bottom of the stairs, a wide brown pot hung by a chain from the ceiling. Vine-like arms stretched in all directions: three, four, five feet long. On the ends were clusters of finger-like flowers the color of burning tobacco. Dozens of tiny flames clung like torches on the tips of a dozen boughs. I'd never seen the like. Epidendrums, I've learned since. They were expensive South American orchids, the kind florists proudly display behind bold signs reading: *Not for sale*.

I didn't pay much attention to the flowers on my way to the staircase. I paused a second or two to see that corner so beautifully aflame in the darkness, but I didn't sigh or marvel at the hues, didn't inhale an orchid's taste with a breath. I moved on past, carrying myself up the stairs like those younger students on their quests. I was as alone as they were: a stranger in my native land.

On the upper floor, I found myself more alone than ever, despite the voices of play-by-play men calling the Cleveland Indians game on the TV. I sipped from my drink, then lingered in place, staring at the wide screen. After a minute or two, I paused at the pool table long enough to roll the cue ball back and forth along the soft umber carpet. I thought about inserting quarters and playing a game by myself, but decided against it when a young man of maybe eighteen came upstairs. He sat down at a table along the far wall and stared at me through thick, squinting eyes.

Picking up my drink, I tilted it toward him in mock salute, then drained it with one swallow. I didn't look at him. I sat the plastic cup on a table and started toward the stairs—head bowed, eyes looking down at the black leather points of my boots.

I made it nearly to the bottom step before I glanced up again and saw that the epidendrums were gone. Or maybe they weren't gone. It could've been a trick of the light, or a case of distraction. Maybe I'd imagined the orchids. Or perhaps I was imagining now that, where the pot had hung in the corner, a young woman stood. Her hair, dyed the same electric red-orange as the epidendrums, was only partly dulled by the shadows that wrapped her eyes like a mask.

I stopped cold, stunned, and stared at her for several seconds—her pale arms folded over her tight white sleeveless blouse, her legs invisible beneath a flowing burgundy skirt too long for summer and too classy for a bar like this or the look she probably intended. She wore black mascara and lipstick as bold as her hair. Now that I think about it, she looked elegant like an orchid, but also wild and tangled like a vine. The shadows in the corner made her face look thin like a model's, though her body appeared heavier. She wasn't fat, but not wiry. Somewhere in between extremes, the center of her blurred as behind a mist. I could barely make out the features of her face: thin nose and delicate, almost undefined lips. She stood alone in the

corner, leaning against the far wall opposite the stairs.

It took me a moment to pull myself together and realize her eyes took detailed notes on me as well. I blinked and forced a smile. Nervous, I nodded and walked toward the bar.

"Another beer?" said the bartender.

"I didn't have a beer," I said.

His eyes were as glassy from drink as his skin was from sweat. His tan tee shirt had soaked through in spots, probably with both. It had a picture of an airplane, a naked woman painted on the nose. "Right," he said. "You're the Jack and Coke. I should remember that. It's not like I have many customers."

"Yeah," I said. "I guess I have a forgettable face."

He forced a grin. "So you want another J and C?"

"Sure. Set me up."

"Give me something fruity, tropical." I turned and saw *her* again. She sat to the left of me on a stool at the bar. I hadn't heard her approach.

"Hey, how old are you?" said the bartender.

"What does it matter? Would you care if I said I was nineteen?"

"Of course I would. It'd be against the law for me to serve you drinks."

"Fine," she told him. "Then I won't say it."

I heard him grunt a laugh more genuine than the grin he'd given me. "I'll make you a Zombie," he said. "That's fruity enough. But only one, you hear?"

"Cool," she said. Then, turning to me, she asked, "What's your story?"

"What do you mean?" My voiced cracked. I coughed to clear my throat.

"You a student or a local?"

I felt the grimace squeezing my lips in angles. Not turning away, I said, "Both, I guess."

"Ah," she exhaled, and I sensed she knew exactly what it meant that I was both. She paused for a moment. "Then maybe you can answer a question for me."

"I'll try."

"Frozen Orange," she said. "That's a hell of a name. Where's it come from?"

I nodded. "Everybody asks that eventually."

"What do you tell them?"

"Well . . ." The words stalled in my head. "Hang on."

The bartender sat my drink in front of me. I paid him, took a slow, sour gulp, and then turned back to the girl. "I heard a story once."

"Tell me." Her hand gripped the plastic holding her fresh drink.

I nodded again. "It's like this. Some moron way back when got the bright idea that an orange grove would turn a profit here. Supposedly he put it right where the college is now."

"In this climate?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, I see."

"So anyway, oranges don't last long in the cold. The chill comes in early off the lake most years, and the warm weather fruits die out."

"So the oranges froze and died?"

"That's not the story."

"Then what?"

"Well, have you ever seen what citrus growers down south do when there's an early



frost?”

She shook her head, sipping blood from her Zombie through a stirring straw. The straw moved back and forth on her bottom lip.

“They’re terrified of the cold. It means death to the whole crop. So someone figured out growers can minimize the damage if they cover the trees with water before a frost comes. They freeze the oranges to save them from the frost. You with me?”

She nodded.

“So the legend is that the oranges had to be frozen every year. They were *always* frozen. Hence Frozen Orange, Pennsylvania.”

“Interesting,” she said. “The orchard owner overcomes his fear of ice and death. Embraces it, really. But it’s wasted transcendence. He never experiences life along the way.”

I watched her closely, though she wouldn’t look at me then. She stared dazedly at her cup.

“It’s just a myth,” I told her. “I believe it about as much as I believe you could teach a three-legged rhino to play hopscotch.”

“Hopscotch?” she said, taking me for serious. “What *do* you believe?”

“I have a theory,” I said, as I’d said so many times before. “It’s just a theory, but I like it better than the myth.”

“So tell me your theory.”

“It’s really simple.”

“I’m listening.” She looked at me coldly, intensely, as if freezing me to protect me from my own inward chill.

“Uh, have you ever been out on the lake at sunrise? Or even sunset? So far out the sun rises or sets to either side of you along the flat, tranquil blue horizon?”

She shook her head.

“Then trust me when I tell you the sun looks like an orange made of ice.”

Neither of us said anything for a long time. We sat at the bar with our drinks never far from our lips. I kept watching her, and she kept watching as the bottom of her cup came into view. Finally I heard the sound of bubbles and air slurping through her straw, followed by the scratching of ice cubes on plastic.

She stood up and, walking by me, put her hand on my shoulder. The touch surprised me, and I tensed. She leaned in until I felt warm breath on top of my ear. “You know,” she whispered, “I think truth must be somewhere between what’s real and what’s myth, between cold reason and metaphor.” She patted my shoulder twice and then left me there thinking about oranges, reasonable metaphors, and lonely seekers chatting over drinks. She’d already vanished like a myth before I realized neither of us had asked the other’s name.

* * * * *

Our living room was the size of a prison cell, with a TV on one wall beneath the window and across from it the tattered furniture Jerry left us—an oak brown rocking chair with an eight-pointed star emblazoned on the largest of three back panels; a lone end table; and a yellow-gold sofa with vinyl patches on the arms and center cushion. The rocking chair barely had enough room for movement without it scraping the beige wall (already marked with brown streaks).

Still, it was a comfortable seat, so I dropped into the chair, rocking softly in a lull while I watched reports on CNN about last-minute panic by business owners and government employees afraid their lives would be turned upside-down by the Y2K computer glitch. People everywhere were scared power plants might shut down or banks would lose all data about their clients' bank accounts. One gray-bearded old man stocked his entire basement with a hundred office-cooler sized containers of water, though he couldn't explain why beyond a general fear things might turn bad. Then there was the family in California that bought gas masks, rifles, flak jackets, and army-style rations for both parents and all six kids because the dad had decided the whole lot of them should go camping at an "undisclosed location" from Christmas until a week after New Year's Day. He kept ranting about machines going haywire and the FBI or the ATF using the opportunity to arrest "good God-fearing citizens" who "knew it was all a big conspiracy."

It amused me to watch so many people worrying over nothing, or at least what I *hoped* was nothing. I had to admit to myself though that all the news, all the babbling about what might happen, all the constant whirring of so many voices together promising the worst—all that made my heart race and my head spin. I wasn't afraid. Not really. But *anxious*. A little nervous. From all the talk, it seemed there was so much that *could* go wrong.

Mercy didn't trouble herself with even that much dread. No matter the possibilities I repeated to her from CNN, she shrugged or sighed and told me, "Be patient, Loose. No matter what happens, the worrying's worse." She and I had done what we could to keep the bar going. We made sure our cash registers were programmed right, and we called our bank to find out if the managers had taken steps to ensure nothing would happen to our money, which they had. "See, be patient. There's nothing to worry about except what you control."

That was a couple weeks ago. Today, Mercy hadn't gotten out of bed yet. I looked in on her earlier when I heard her groan an incomprehensible word. I saw her, as usual, stripped bare and lying on her side, red hair tussled in a bird's nest on fire. The brown blankets, missing from half the bed, were wrapped around her like cellophane. She had one arm free, squeezing a pillow like a lover. Her face, pink and lined with impressions, wore an expression like concern.

"You OK?" I said. She said nothing, and I figured she was still asleep, maybe dreaming herself into some other state of being. I wondered what she dreamt today, and if she'd tell me.

For now, I stared at CNN as it showed a flashback to one news broadcast or another from many years ago. The story bored me, and I fumbled with the remote, trying to change the channel. The batteries were dead or loose in their grooves, so nothing happened. I sighed, resigned to sitting still and watching whatever nonsense CNN threw at me.

As if attracted by the sound I made, Mercy's kitten hopped onto my lap with a half-meow like a martial artist's cry while chopping through a board. She didn't sit down right away but kneaded my lap with her tiny creamsicle paws as if she were fluffing a pillow.

"Hey there, Nostalgia," I said, stroking her head with my free hand.

She purred like Mercy on the one night we shared a bed.

What a perfect night. We'd just moved into the apartment and were celebrating with champagne while we sat in the floor, leaning against the sofa. We both wore plain tee shirts and shorts stained with gray-blue paint from an afternoon of touching up the walls in the bar downstairs. Joshua Redman's *Moodswing* album hummed soft, romantic sax melodies on the stereo.

At one point, Mercy leaned in close and said, "I want to try something."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Promise you won't get mad?"

"Why would I get mad?"

She grinned evilly, so unlike her. "Just promise."

"Fine, I promise."

"You won't get mad."

"I promise I won't get mad."

Then she leaned in further and kissed me hard with her eyes closed as though to experience everything by touch without distracting herself with what she saw. Mercy and I had kissed before. Several times. But they were friendly kisses, passionless and promising nothing. They came and went like a *Thank you* or *Hello*. This time, we could have been hungry strangers. Her lips stuck forcefully to mine, and I opened my mouth to caress hers.

She held the contact for a long breath, groaning "Mmmm" before pulling away. "Wow," she said. "I didn't know it'd be like that."

I said, "Why in the world would I be angry?"

"I don't know, but I thought you might be. We're not like that, you know? I was worried you'd think I was ruining what we had, like maybe you'd reject me."

"I didn't. I couldn't."

"I can see that now. But I thought maybe you'd just accept it passively, thinking, *Oh, she's being a silly girl*. I never expected you to kiss me back the way you did."

"You're crazy," I said. "That was great. I want to do it again."

She smiled wide and did what I suggested, kissing me as though we were already lovers, as though what came next had already been decided long ago. "Mmmm," she said. "You taste like champagne." So did she, although she also had a grape flavor from her clear lip-gloss. "Mmmm," she said again, and kissed me even harder than before.

"I've always wondered," she said hours later as we lay pressed together on the sofa, my hand tracing the line of grayish paint dried around her neck with an equally gray-blue finger. Her eyes were closed. My head arched slightly above hers, I watched her eyelids flutter with every touch.

"What did you wonder?"

"What it'd be like."

"Sex?"

"Sex with you," she clarified. "You're so attentive when we talk. I wondered if it'd be the same in bed."

"Was it what you hoped?"

"Mmmm," she sighed. "What I expected."

"That's a good sign," I said.

"Mmmm," she replied.

I bent down and kissed a circle of paint like a lip print at the base of her neck.

"Mmmm," she moaned. "Behave."

The next morning, I didn't know how to treat her. Were we still friends? Did the act of making love make us lovers? Did she regret it? I certainly didn't, but would I?

She came out of the bathroom wrapped in two yellow towels—one a mini-dress, the other a turban on her head. I caught her in the hall and tried to kiss her. "Don't," she said.

"Is everything all right?"

"Maybe," she said.

I tried again.

She let me kiss her, but it was passionless. "Nothing's wrong," she said. "I just want to get dressed and run to the store real quick."

"OK," I said, and kissed her again before I let her go.

* * * * *

Mercy's nose bled on the drive, red and radiant as her hair. I looked in the rearview mirror and saw a trickle tracing the corner of her nostril before she felt its presence on her upper lip. "I haven't had a nosebleed in years," she said.

I pulled off the Interstate at the next exit and found her a gas station where she could get tissues or toilet paper to soak up the excess. "I don't believe this," she moaned, her hand squeezing her nasal passages shut. "I never get sick on trips. I never let my health get in the way of a little fun."

"Maybe your body's telling you something. Are you nervous?"

"Not in the least," she assured me.

"Hmm," I said.

We sat in the parking lot for fifteen minutes as she tried to get the bleeding under control. It seemed to get worse while we waited. The first wad of toilet paper was a thick blob of Rorschach blots when she pulled it away to look. She had to go back to the bathroom twice to get more, the second time returning with extra balls of it. "Just drive," she said. "It's not doing any good sitting here, so let's get moving. I'm sure it'll stop here in a minute."

I kept glancing at her in the mirror while I drove. What I could see of her expression made her look overwhelmed, perhaps a little bit afraid. If I weren't driving, I would've put my arm around her, comforted her, promised, "There, there. It'll be all right."

Instead, I offered, "Let me know if you need to stop again. Let me know if you need *anything*. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help."

She ignored my offer, too absorbed in the bathroom tissues she clung to like a talisman. Again and again, she pulled them away to check the progress, but the blood kept flowing as if from a bullet wound. It seemed to get more vivid every time she looked at it, like charcoal embers smoldering brighter. "I don't believe it. This is amazing. It's like I'm being punished by the Divine for pretending to be a religious leader. I almost want you to turn around and take me back."

"I will if that's what you want."

She shook her head, the hand holding her nose swaying with her like an elephant's trunk.

"OK, well, let me know if you need another break."

After a while, the wads of bloody toilet paper built up a monument in my loose change tray. I thought I could smell the sickly stench of blood filling the car like cigarette smoke, so I turned the air conditioner on maximum to get fresh air flowing through. Mercy sighed a dozen times, looking at her tissues and scowling, the blood still streaking down onto her lip. "I think it's easing up," she said once, then quickly scowled at me in the mirror that I tilted more in her direction for a better view. "I was wrong," she said.

"Do you need to stop?" I kept asking.

She said no or shook her head at first, but after a while she kept silent when I asked as if to tell me that she'd let me know. I finally pulled off in Morgantown, just after we crossed over into West Virginia. She said it wasn't necessary, but I lied and said I wanted to get some lunch.

We stopped at a little restaurant, and I got us a table while she headed for the bathroom. I ordered coffee and assured the waitress everything was OK with my friend and that we'd order as soon as she got back. I must have sat there for twenty minutes before Mercy came to the table. She held a fresh wad of toilet paper in her hand but didn't have any pressed to her nose. "I think it finally stopped," she said. I studied her face. It was flushed and frowning. A crust of dried blood coated the corner of her left nostril like mold on a rock.

"Are you sure you're OK?"

She pretended to look at her menu, not answering at first. Then she told me, "I think sometimes the ugliness of life pops up just to remind you to be on guard. T equals Y plus Z, in which you are Y and Z is something else. I'm getting more and more convinced that Z has something to do with misery, brutality, bleakness. Maybe it's making peace with it, or maybe just surviving it. I'm not sure yet. But I'll figure it out." She paused to sip from a glass of ice water. "There's so much that's troubling in a life. I think when you can welcome those troubles, when you can say 'you're beautiful' to all that's ugly, you might finally achieve Z. Maybe."

"You got that from a nosebleed?"

"No. I've been thinking that lately. The blood reminded me of it. I had to fight a little harder today, that's all. It's very fortunate. I'd hate to have forgotten that before we run into Weeks."

"Is that what you want to teach down here?"

She shook her head. "I'm not sure this can be taught. It has to be experienced." Her face bounced between grin and grimace, a curious and crazy look. She disappeared into her thoughts for a while, then met my gaze and sternly said, "A little bit of trouble and a little bit of overcoming. That's a little bit of Z, a little bit of T. A good test. A good start to any journey. If you must know, I keep hoping for another ultimate test. I think I failed the last one when Mom died. So I need another chance. Maybe I'll get it right the next time."

* * * * *



THE SUN WAS BEAZING THAT DAY, I REMEMBER
 THE FOOTPRINTS WERE HARD TO DISTINGUISH
 LIKE THOSE ALREADY LAPPED BY THE SEA.
 MOSTLY CHILDREN'S FOOTPRINTS.
 WE WERE IN A SMALL GUE MADE BY AN ANCIENT
 CLIFF COLLAPSE, THE LONG SWEEPING BAY,
 THE WIDE BEACH, SPARSELY PEOPLED,
 FORMING A BACKDROP I LOOKED OUT ON
 FAIRLY OFTEN, TOO HOT & TIRED TO TRY
 TO CATCH EVERY WORD. SANDBAGS
 STRUCTURED THE SITE, MADE WALLS
 AROUND THE PITS, AND WALKWAYS
 WE TROD CAREFULLY OUT INTO THEM.
 AMONG THE SEMI-ABSTRACT DENTS
 LAY HOMO SAPIENS WITH PAINT BRUSHES
 CAREFULLY SWEEPING GRAINS OF SAND
 INTO BUSTPANS. NONE OF US WANTED
 TO RUIN THE STORY, OR RATHER BLUNDER INTO IT
 HEAVY-HANDED LIKE EIGHTY THOUSAND YEARS LATE,
 STARTLING THE NEANDERTHAL CHILDREN
 WHO DASHED THIS WAY & THAT
 WHILE THEIR PARENTS BUTCHERED DINNERS.
 IT WOULD BE HALF THAT TIME AGAIN
 BEFORE WE SPLIT OUT OF AFRICA &
 PUSHED THEM OFF THE EDGE OF SPAIN,
 MAYBE NOT REALLY MEANING TO, WHO KNOWS?
 ANYWAY IN SOME SMALL WAY NOW
 THEIR TIME HAS COME AGAIN. SOME OF US HERE
 MIGHT EVEN CARRY THE TINIEST SLITHER
 OF THEIR DNA. I TRY TO FOCUS ON WHAT
 THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING BUT MOSTLY
 I'M JUST LOOKING AROUND. THEY SEEM LIKE
 NIKE PEOPLE THOUGH, IT WOULD BE NICE
 TO BE ABLE TO INTERACT MORE. I FEEL DIZZY
 AND SEEK THE ONE, RAPIDLY DISAPPEARING,
 PATCH OF SHADE, BREATHING A SIGH OF RELIEF
 AMONG THE SALT POPPIES.

19-10-19
 ①

(LEE ROZEL)
 (SUMMER 2019)



Le Rozel

The sun blazes down this day I remember,
 the footprints are hard to decipher,
 like those already lapped by the sea
 —it is a miracle
 they remain at all—
 perfect accidents in the sediment.

Among these semi-abstract dents
 Homo sapiens
 sapiens lie gently,
 gently swishing grains of sand
 with paintbrushes into dustpans.

We tread carefully,
 not wanting to ruin the story,
 blunder into it eighty thousand years late,
 startling the cave kids who play around the place
 while their parents butcher dinner a little further up the ways.

The wide beach, the long sweep of the bay,
 draws my gaze, too tired & dizzy to catch
 all this mirage might say. I seek the one
 rapidly disappearing patch of shade,
 breathing a sigh of relief
 among the salt poppies.

* * *



Sam Knot

Gardeners' Worlds

I want to remember the small concrete troughs
that we raised above the Valerian Rouge
beneath the windowsills, on stately breeze blocks
—looking nice enough, surprisingly—a chunky
weathered compliment to the old stone wall.

Not just come spring shall I recall
we put a troop of tulip bulbs along the bottom
—*do you remember what they were called?*
I ask you now (it was only yesterday)
—*Festivals you think maybe?*
But that that might not be a proper variety?
Well, we should try to get it right, shouldn't we?
If it's going to be poetry?—

Not just come spring shall I recall
our festive little troop of tulip bulbs,
nor just one time shall I enjoy
the crocuses that will flank the front door.

These flowers will always remember me more
 than themselves,
 than all the times
we snuggled up on the sofa watching *Gardeners' World*,
(Old Montague Don sprinkling grit around his alpines
to keep them looking tidy in the rain)
 than the fact that
my sinuses were blocked, & that ginger & lemon
couldn't quite alleviate my headache
(nor standing on my head, nor chanting nasally)
but your Paracetamol did, & the deep joy
of gardening like they did on telly—

just a couple of pots that the voles couldn't touch
filled with earth from the forest's edge,
& topped with gravel that you had borrowed
from the road, & that you had prepared all this
for me to come & just enjoy with you
 our own little *Gardener's World*
 on repeat in eternity, each time
 a little differently, like love.

* * *

To do.

Feeding the young hare—the little leveret—
 & the old horse—does an old horse have
 a technical term? Or are these perhaps
 my own metaphors? My mischievous ears
 posing questions. My hairy lips pumping
 at the rubber teet, or like fingertips
 digging through the grains. My hooves
 in accordance with the path. My paws
 ignoring the newspaper. My curiosity
 at the clover. My hide against
 the electric fence. My instinct to care,
 to do things for others, a serving of
 my own desires? Don't even need
 their reasons to be
 my reward. Not sleeping well.
 Autumn comes tossing & turning us
 like dried leaves in our bed, full
 of ghost-like dreams. Strong coffee
 & raw cream in my
 my quivering heart! A start for what? All
 the worlds inside the raindrops—
 codes of crane-fly legs against
 the bathroom window—shocked still
 at eternity's infinite dawn. All
 my ears pricked to the potent silence
 wind brings into my housed selves—
 chimneys moaning & windows
 not properly closed—a silence
 always some place else—this
 weathering nervousness who soothes me.
 Who sooothes me? These things I do
 for you, for us, for I
 & I & I & I & I &
 I am giving these selves, I giving cells,
 the blessed tasks of each other to know
 in all these seeming distractions
 our master meaning itself.

* * * * *



The Crocodile King of Belize

[Prose]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 109 | October 2019)

xix. Fire - September 5th, 2010

The tropical sun rises red behind the silhouette of spiky jungle trees. The air is still cool with the passing of the night air. The thumping of the idling bus motors can be heard throughout the village of San Marcos. A howler monkey hoots in the concealed jungle behind them, while a flock of arguing parrots flies above on their daily migration to the sea.

"Come on. Come on, everybody. Load up. Let's go," shouts Isabella in her loudest voice, which is still not much louder than normal conversation. Three buses are rumbling in the center of town. Mayans are coming out of their thatched huts and boarding the machines. All the men are carrying machetes, and some of them hold shotguns. The women are clutching either babies or packages wrapped in dark blankets. Jimmy's bus is now full, and Eddie's bus and Attul's bus soon follow, until there is standing room only on all of them. There is much jabber between everyone on the bus. When all prattle together in the Kekchi Mayan language, it sounds similar to drumsticks being played on a woodpile.

Along the highway to town, the jungle is still a dark to black green, awaiting the full rays of sun. The buses are quiet now as their indignant passengers roll into town to the police station. No other cars are about the street this early, and there are only a few lackluster pedestrians walking toward some bureaucratic desk job or other. An emaciated dog slinks along the wall of the station.

As soon as the buses pull up in front of the "PoPo" place, twenty men come pouring out of each bus. Moving like a school of fish, they herd to the front door of the station. The two officers at the front desk come out to meet them. One is a fat black man who seems half asleep, the other a tiny Mestizo mix with quick sudden moves.

"Hunna. What be you doing here? What you want?" says the big black cop.

"We want you . . . the police . . . to come out to the white man's crocodile farm out Janko Calle way," answers Nathan Choc, who is at the front of the crowd.

"We mek no vex with de crocodile man. You crowd is illegal. Go back to the village," says the smaller cop.

"You must come with us for justice. You must help us get the children from the crocodile man!"

"Mi cops are not going to do shit for you. Mebby we put you in jail? Nocho?"

"You have to come with us to save the children," insists Nathan.

"No. We not go on the speculation of a witch. No crime here. You go back to the village or we'll have to arrest you," says the fat officer, even though he sees that he's outnumbered twenty to one. *Just keep up the authority with these little jungle rats and they'll tow the line*, he



thinks. *They will do as they are told.*

"Get back on the bus and go home. Nobody's going out to Janko Calle," he says in his deepest booming voice.

"You a lazy PoPo. You need to help us. You need to care about the lost children. You need to search the croc farm for the children."

"There will be no search. No going out there. Nothing to see there. No children there. Now *go home!*" Nathan looks intently at the scowling face of the stonewalling officer. Then at the other angry eyes around him. He sees the futility of trying to get any help from the police.

"OK. We go," is all he says.

Every one clambers back on the bus, and Jimmy and Eddie and Attul honk their horns excessively as they drop it in gear and thunderously round the corners of town and get back on the Southern Highway out of Punta Gorda. Out ten miles to the turn off to the Dump, that stretch of dirt road where the trash is flung to the side, and which continues on to the ACES compound. Buzzard Road.

The buses lurch side to side as they swamp through the mud holes, throwing the Mayans in the bus violently into each other. The six-mile road into the old banana landing is a gauntlet of water-filled mud-holes, many the size of a small car. But the big buses plow through, often scraping their tails on the way.

Within the buses is much excitement, as the mob nears the compound. Many tense voices.

"We will find them."

"The soothsayer said they were being kept underground."

"I think this guy will have them in cages."

"Cages in the trees?"

"No. Cages next to the crocodile pens so the crocs can see their next meal."

"So the kids can see who will eat them?"

"Yeah. They are probably making a movie."

"Maybe they are in the house?"

"I think they have already been fed to the crocodiles!"

The buses roll right through the property line and right up to within one hundred feet of the house. Some Mayans leap right off the bus, clutching their shotguns and swinging their machetes over their head. Within a minute, there is a crowd assembled in front of the house.

"Mr. JC, Mr. JC! We are here to search for our children!" shouts Nathan.

The crowd is quiet except for murmuring in Kekchi, which sounds a little like a small stream nearby. The mob is met with silence.

"Mr. JC, Mr JC! We are here peacefully to ask if we can look around for our kids. We have been told that they are here!" shouts Nathan again.

"Son-of-a-bitch is hiding in there!" shouts someone in the crowd.

"Knock on the door!" shouts another. Ten of the men run up on the porch and pound their fists on the wooden entry.

"They are hiding the children inside. We need to get in! Stand back!" One of the Mayans levels his shotgun to his hip and blasts the door lock at five feet. Splinters of wood fly in all directions, and the door leaps open. The Mayans push through it into the living room. Here there is plush leather couches, fine glass tables, Tiffany-style lamps. Everything is very clean. The hoard pours into the house, searching every room, going upstairs into the

bedrooms, crowding into the master bathroom in wonder at the perfect white porcelain. The women stuff shampoo and soap into their pockets. A lucky one steals a small bottle of perfume.

"There's nobody here. Nocho?" says one.

"I can't find anybody either. Where are the children? What have they done with them?" wails Isabella.

"Look under the house. The psychic said they were underground," someone else suggests.

A dozen go back out the door and begin thrashing around under the porch and floor boards. There is a lot of stored equipment under the house that is tossed out as they dig through the cargo for hidden passageways or big boxes full of children.

"Is there anything down there?" calls Nathan.

"No. We not find anything. Must be secret, secret passageway in house."

The search is renewed throughout the lodge, only this time they smash holes in the wall to see if there is anything hidden behind the sheet rock. Nathan sweeps through a pile of papers on the computer table but, being barely able to read, whatever is there is a mystery to him. Another man, Adill, sits on the keyboard in an act of contempt, as if planting his asshole on this familiar and frequently used item will show the white people his disdain for them. He lights a cigarette with a wooden match.

The still lit match is carelessly thrown on the floor into the disarray of papers. Nathan and Adill lean silently on the table, watching the flames grow in the papers without trying to extinguish anything by stamping or any other means. A kind of mesmerized apathy takes hold of them.

"The kids must be outside. Check the crocodile pens!"

The flames are now climbing the computer table leg, and the plastic-fibered rug begins burning hotly below it.

"Out to the pens!" yells Nathan once more.

Dozens of Mayans are smashing through the guest cabins now, breaking windows. A microwave comes flying off the porch and breaks apart on the hard driveway. The crowd is wild-eyed now, rushing in and out of the buildings. Mostly they are silent as they go about their work with only the occasional swear word amid the crashing and splintering of furniture.

"The house is burning. The house is burning!" yells one of the Mayans, as much in glee as in announcement. The flames have spread to the walls and are starting to lick out of the windows in crimson flowers.

Within minutes, the upper story of the lodge is burning like a fraternity hall bonfire. Meanwhile, the mob trashes the cabins. The aluminum roof of the grand house is melting like tissue paper under a faucet. The outbuildings have also been lit on fire, and flames are climbing out of their windows.

"The kids are in the crocodiles! The white devils have fed the kids to the crocs. Kill the crocks!" Nathan shouts, as he stands silhouetted against the burning compound. Dozens of Mayans rush down to the dock, where the crocodiles look lazily up from their pens.

Nathan and Vincient lasso a large croc and pull it to the float's edge.

"Stand back!" cries Danial, as he levels a shotgun to the beast's head.

Boom! A hole erupts in the crocodile's head.

"Cut it open. Cut it open!" yells Vincient as he hauls the beast on to the dock.

Nathan tries to get his knife into the animal's belly, but the skin is too tough.

“Lemme try,” says Danial as he slides a two-foot razor sharp machete from his belt.

With some digging, he gets the knife beneath the dead croc’s scales by starting at its anus. The knife slashes open the belly from the chin to the tail, spilling the guts all over the dock.

The stomach is split apart, revealing its greenish mush of mud and some undigested meat. A few bone fragments are in the mess.

“Here they are! Here they are! The devils have fed them to the crocs! Kill them all!”

Four Mayans now set to the job of shooting all the penned-up crocodiles. The animals have no escape. One by one they are hauled up on to the dock and split apart by a team of blood-covered men, slashing precisely to get to the stomach contents of the animals.

In all of them is found partially digested meat, but it is not really identifiable as human remains. In the dock shack is some hacked up meat in a bag that is likely the source of feed-stuff, it being bad cuts of rotten beef. But the Mayans are convinced that it is digested children, and continue to shoot and haul the crocodiles out of their pens for evisceration.

In one they find a piece of rag, a one-time piece of clothing, which fuels their conviction that their children were consumed. Women scream and wail as each new animal is gutted in front of them, every time imagining that the tiny hands and heads of the children will be disgorged onto the dock. But they are not.

Then a shoe is found.

“Aaha! This is proof! This crocodile has eaten the children,” shouts Nathan. “Chop ’em all open! Here is where the children are!”

Vincent readies the rope for another capture. One by one, the crocodiles are eviscerated.

By now the lodge is a wall of flame. Everyone is back a few hundred feet. The Land Rover in front of the main building is also on fire from the intense heat. Its windows burst with excited flames from the seats. Then suddenly . . . *pow! pow! pow! pow!* as shots are fired from the pillar of flame. Dozens of bullets go off in rapid succession and many at the same time.

“It’s ammo. The ammo pile is burning and exploding!” yells Danial.

Shots are whizzing through the air and tinkling like little bells when they hit something, like the buses. This is JC’s armory. As the bullets heat, they explode. But, being unconfined by the firing chamber of a gun, they explode both ways, flinging the brass casing out backwards with a velocity in proportion to the mass of the bullet going the other way at random.

Dozens of shots are hitting the side of the school bus, but not breaking the windows. The terrified Mayan women cower inside between the seats.

All at once, a huge explosion, sharp, a concussion wave, and a huge fireball sends up flaming boards in the air like burning hay. A shower of sparks rains down on everyone, as if a Fourth of July mortar went off among them, a chrysanthemum-colored incendiary.

A grenade has gone off in the back of the house. The Mayan men are flattened to the ground. This is too much. Even for these adrenaline-driven beserkers. A guy could get killed out here. They pull themselves from the ground and crowd back around the buses. Bullets and shell casings continue to send projectiles flying wildly by. The casings make more of a howling noise as they pass, compared to the high whine of the tumbling bullets.

Only the croc choppers on the dock continue their grisly work. But the party’s over. All is destroyed. There is nothing more to be done. No children are found in the crocs.

Only the shoe.

All the animals are slaughtered, and the corpses are pushed into the river to float out to

sea.

The floating dock is red with gator blood. Most stand back from this orgy of slaughter, their eyes wide in excitement and horror. Behind them, the flames consume the last of the house with a few random shells of ammunition going off every few moments. The Range Rover in front of the house glows red in places, the tires burn with a black smoke. The three cabins are completely in flames; the first cabin already collapsed into a pile of debris. The dock is a heap of crocodile guts.

A Mayan man stands in the midst, covered in blood, still gripping his slippery machete—but with a dazed and confused look on his face.

“They’re not here, or they are already digested by these crocs. I don’t think we found them,” says Nathan.

“Do you think they did it?” asks someone.

“Yeah, they killed the kids. She said so. Just because we can’t find proof doesn’t mean they didn’t do it.”

Nathan looks around at the war zone. Everything is burning. Smoke and glowing ash is in the air everywhere. There is no structure or container that is not reduced to smoldering rubble.

“We’ve done enough here,” Nathan says finally. “Now is the time to go.”

The mob moves back to the three bus doors, filing in respectfully as if it were a usual return from the market. There is guilt on many faces, as a “search” turned into the destruction of everything these people had. But, then again, they were not humans, but murderous white devils who ate the children and had no remorse. They got what they deserved.

The buses bump and reel from side to side as they pull away from the burning ruins. The passengers are silent, wondering what fate will befall them now after such an attack on a rich American.

Two hours later, a contingent of ten police arrive on the scene to “protect” the investment of JC Steinberg and the American ACES compound. Chief Juan Crispers arrives to work in the morning and hears out the fat and the skinny officers.

The fat fellow had wet himself in fear of the Mayan hoard, but the little guy wants to go after them with the machine guns that JC has supplied them with. Chief Crispers reasons that since this American JC has armed them with most small infantry weapons, that they should go out to Janko Calle and see if the bush babies are causing any problems with the Steinbergs.

What the Chief finds is ash. The entire compound is obliterated. No buildings remain. The Land Rover is a burned-out metal shell. The river is red with blood, and the heaps of crocodile meat are black with swarms of four million flies. It is a scene of Armageddon. Total destruction. A crime of the highest order.

The chief is deeply sour-faced. He knows that this will reflect back on him, and he scrolls through excuses in his mind that he can use later when questioned.

He goes through some perfunctory procedures, taking pictures of the dead crocs, of the burned-down house, of the bus tire tracks, but he knows that these will just wind up in some forgotten file, never to be used for anything. He knows who did it. The entire village of San Marcos.

He knows he should have stopped them . . . some how. That he should have protected the American’s property. But it’s too late now. Now nothing can be done. Somebody should be arrested—but who? The residents of San Marcos will deny everything, and there is no actual

proof other than these bus tracks, which could be anybody. How can the population of San Marcos be arrested for chaos and destruction?

There is no case and no evidence, no witnesses even though there were a hundred. The Chief knows his ass is on the line. He needs a fall guy for the crime, and fast. Firing the fat one and the other skinny officer will not be enough.

xx. San Pedro Post Fire - October 2010

"Dun da. Dun da da da Dun!" The phone rings with its designer tone *Star Wars* theme. Time to conquer the Dark Side.

With characteristic irritation, JC digs the cell phone out of his pack.

"What?" He has assimilated the rude indifferent greeting of the natives.

"Mr. JC, Mr. JC. It's gone. It's all gone!"

"*Who the fuck is this?* What's gone?"

"Mr. JC, this is Sergeant Ackum from the Punta Gorda Police. It's gone."

"*What the fuck is gone? Why the hell are you calling me?* I'm totally busy right now, out on a boat and about to catch a croc. State your business and leave me alone."

"Your *casa*, Mr. JC. It's gone!"

"Clarify. *Quickly.*"

"The Mayans burned your house down. There's nothing left."

"*What the fuck are you talking about?* Has there been an accident?"

"No boss. No accident. A mob of three packed buses came to the PoPo station and demanded that we arrest you for stealing the children. We tried to calm them down, but it not happening. Then they all left."

"Well?"

"They done go out to your place for mischief. Crowd get out of hand and the place burn down."

"Burn down! *What the hell are you saying?* Wadda ya mean *burn down?*"

"All gone, Mr. JC. Burned to the ground. Everything. All gone."

"Why the hell didn't you stop them! You're the police, that's what you are supposed to do! You knew they were going to do something! Why didn't you follow them?"

"But Mr. JC, I cannot leave my post in the police front desk. Me no know nothing. Know nothing of what the Indians intended." To say *indians* is intended as a racial slur to the Mayan, a weak move to gain favor with JC.

"You fucking idiot! You probably gave them directions! *You* are responsible for a million dollars up in smoke!"

"Me no ina it. Me no know nothing. You must talk to Chief Crispers," Ackum pleads.

"Yeah. I'll talk to Crispers. I'll get you fired, you ingrate!"

Ackum doesn't know what an *ingrate* is, but suspects it's something bad.

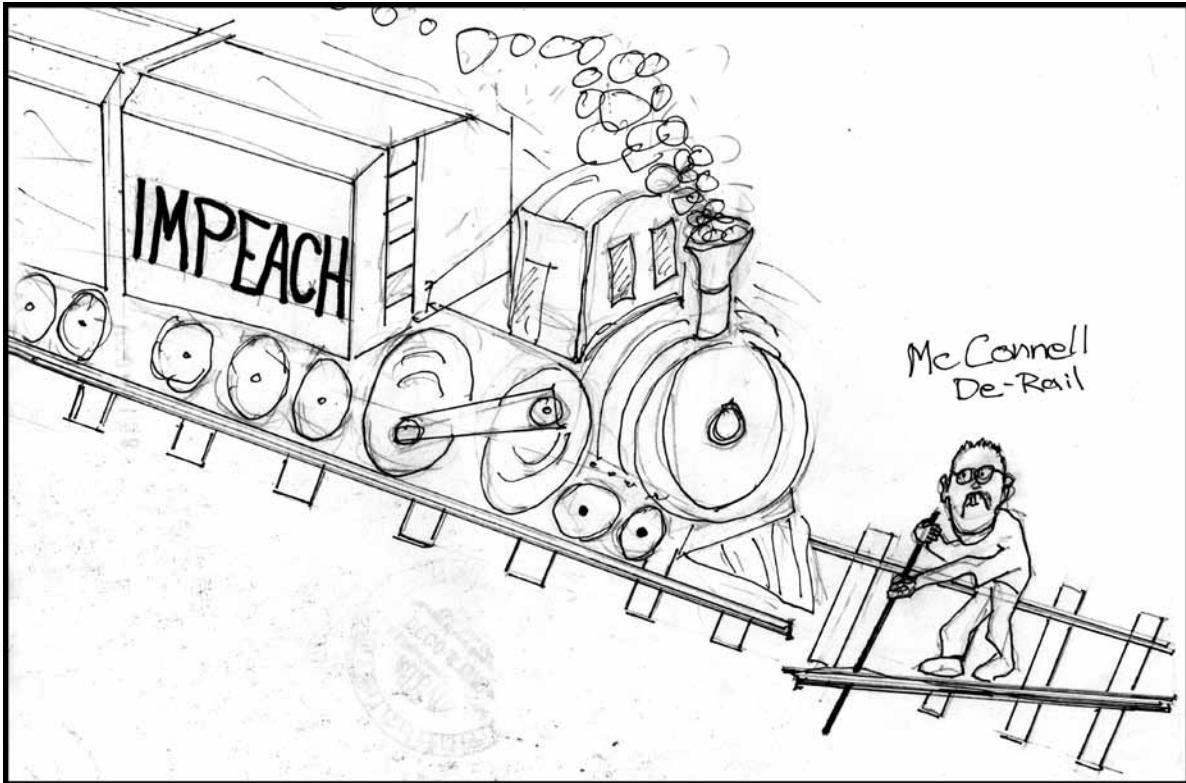
"Me no ina it," Ackum repeats himself. "You talk to Crispers."

Then he hangs up abruptly. He is afraid of more verbal abuse, a common aversion among the Belizean bureaucracies.

"What the fuck? What the fuck? The asshole hung up on me! To shore!" demands JC.

"But Mr. JC, we just got out here. Must catch the crocodile."

"My ass. We don't have to catch shit. My house just got burned down. I have to find



Charlie Beyer

out what happened. Who to kill.”

“OK, boss. We go. Quick thing.”

“It better be. Haul those lines in.”

On shore, JC calls Chief Crispers.

“What the hell is going on? What’s this about my place burning?”

“Oh Mr. JC. Sad thing. Sad thing. Place all gone.”

“*Gone! Gone!* How is it gone?”

“The village of San Marcos came in buses and burned everything. The house, the outbuildings, the Land Rover, and they even killed all the crocodiles.”

“Killed the crocs? Why the hell did they do that?”

“They sliced them open looking for the children. Did you feed the children to the crocodiles, Mr. JC?”

“*Hell no!* The hell with you, you idiot, for accusing me! I’m the only one giving back anything to the community here. I am an exemplary citizen.”

Juan doesn’t know what “exemplary” means, but suspects it’s a high title of some sort.

“I know that you know the Prime Minister, that you will talk to him, and we are doing everything that we can.” The Chief thinks the word might relate to *emperor*, and thus thinks JC is citing the top dog of the country.

“What arrests have you made? Tell me who is in jail over this?”

“No one is in jail, Mr. JC. No arrests yet.”

“No arrests? Why the hell not? You know who did it.”

“Yes, Mr. JC. But we can’t arrest the whole village.”

“Why not? These bastards burned me out. Who are the ringleaders?”

“We have not determined that yet. Everyone seemed to have acted together. No one is saying anything. Not that they were there, or who the leaders are. It is said that a witch from Guatemala told them to do it.”

“Arrest her. Arrest the elders in the village. Arrest all the men.”

“This we cannot be doing, Mr. JC. The witch fled back to Guatemala. We have no proof of who was there or not.”

“Well, for Christ’s sake. can’t you arrest a few of them and sweat them under the lights to confess? *What the fuck is wrong with you people?*”

“We have this under investigation, Mr. JC. Please be patient.”

“Patient. *Patient!* Are you nuts? The criminals are walking free. Where’s a shred of justice?”

“We are looking into it, Mr. JC. It may take a while.”

“Awhile?! I know you turds. You ain’t doing shit and you don’t plan on doing shit. If a white guy gets screwed and ruined by your black hoards, you just laugh. You don’t give a crap and you sound particularly stupid trying to convince anyone you will ever do shit. Just a pack of lazy hypocrite assholes sponging off the government dole.”

“We are not racists or hipsters,” he replies. Not understanding the slur “hypocrites” leveled by JC. “We are just doing our job.”

“The job of doing nothing. I’m taking *all* you bastards to court!”

“Good luck with that.”

“And you are the first in the docket, Chief Crispers.”

“OK, Mr. JC,” says the Chief, who then hangs up abruptly without a goodbye. Another

phobic to verbal abuse.

The *Amandala* newspaper hears of the story. They contact JC for an interview that comes out as a string of unprintable curses and vitriol. “Savages,” he tells the reporter. “Savages is what they are. A hoard of lawless jungle monkeys from the Stone Age. These [motherfucker, cock-sucking, asshole] criminal savages need to be brought to justice. Either that, or [shoot] (edited to the word “punish”) the [motherfucking] criminals.

“We at ACES were trying to enhance Belize with a new scientific industry. To put this place on the map. To bring in intellectuals from all over the world. And the thanks we get? *Burned out by savages*. Savages. I’m going to the highest court in this [racist] land, and demand restitution of a million dollars. I’ve put my life and everything I’ve ever owned into the Crocodile Research Center. I have nothing left. This country will *pay!*”

xxi. The Forgotten Crime - January 2011

In the ten years after this crime, no police work has been done on this mystery. No evidence has been gathered. No clues found, and no charges have been brought against any of the villagers of San Marcos.

A small cement cast memorial was set up on the highway at about the point of the children’s abduction. It is almost unnoticeable now, overgrown in weeds, as the jungle tries to efface all traces of humanity.

The police spend their time as always, raiding the homes of ex-pats on trumped up charges, and confiscating all the electronics and drugs they can find. Then in the back rooms of the police station, they smoke the Mayan weed and play Candy Crush on phones and tablets so generously donated by the robbed northerners.

Ramone went back to Florida after missing the village storming of the Crocodile Sanctuary. He missed it because he was in a two-day sleep to recover from five days of drinking and snuffing Guatemalan crack made with acetone solvent. His tiny body was over-used and collapsed on a cot in the dog room at Allen’s. The apoplexy of barking for each new visitor did not stir him, being far beyond the walls of wakefulness.

A day or so after waking, and then after apologizing to everyone he had threatened to hack in the previous week, Ramone discovered that he’s down to his last eight hundred bucks. He must rush home for replenishment. Although he could fly home on a first class jet, because he is a millionaire, he feels he must find the absolutely cheapest form of transportation.

But first he must screw Gina in the downtown hotel, before he leaves town. Registration is through a barred window. In the process of swilling another bottle of rum and some brief coitus with plump Gina, he winds up on the street, yelling at passersby of his great wrestling prowess and their stupid slave attitudes.

Most hurry by the crazy, but a few stop to punch him in the face. Though enraged, he does not pursue them, as he cannot walk.

Gina finds this time appropriate to relieve Ramone of five hundred dollars, being kind to leave him enough to get home on a thin margin.

He never realizes the theft until on the barko crossing from Belize to Guatemala. From there he takes a chicken bus along the coast and into Honduras. Here is Spirit Airline with a direct flight to Miami for \$82.

This is the “Chicken Airplane.” It is packed with the unwashed and dirty clothed people.

Some hold chickens in their laps and there is a goat in the aisle. No drinks are served. The captain gives no updates. When it lands in Miami, a great cheer overtakes the passengers. The captain would be elected president if this was his voting base. The gratitude is overwhelming. The captain debarks for the lounge with a chicken under his arm.

Ramone decides to check up on his Miami investments, which consists of a single sailboat in the marina, rented out to a questionable drug dealer. Ramone has a sidekick, a young man trailing behind him for the constant supply of rum and drugs. Together they swill considerably and snort lots of the white powder. While heading down to the boat launch, and rowing out to the moored sailboat to clamber aboard, Ramone works himself up into a fury.

“The muthafucker didn’t pay his rent. The bent dick . . .”

Then, wild-eyed and huffing like a bull, Ramone bursts through the transom into the sailboat hold in his signature fury.

“Where’s my rent, muthafucker?” he shouts at the still torpid inhabitant.

“Yeah. Pay up asshole,” chimes in the sidekick.

“We’re gonna fuck you up, dick head,” cries Ramone, puffing out his little chest.

The renter is terrified but returns only a steely glare. As Ramone stumbles toward him with intentions of a full nelson, a Glock 9 emerges from under the bed covers. It is gripped tightly behind the drug dealer’s beady eyes. The pistol erupts and three slugs fling the puny wrestlers body across the cabin.

Thinking clearer now, he levels the gun at the sidekick and fills him with lead also.

The renter dumps the bodies over the side, and makes a getaway in the small skiff. The still water reflects the lights of shore in kaleidoscopic flashes of color.

The murderer is caught a few days later.

A week later, there is a plaintive cry outside Casa Bonita, Allen’s restaurant.

“Forgive me, Allen. Please forgive me,” wails the voice. All inside recognize Ramone’s voice and collectively groan at the thought that he has returned so quickly to Belize to continue making their life miserable.

Reluctantly, Allen goes out front to find . . . nothing. Not a trace of the wild kid.

The specter returned to make impossible amends, before his long journey to the underworld?

Allen and his local wife continue to live and work in the restaurant. Along with their four grandkids tearing up the place, a few of the wife’s sisters, some of their deadbeat husbands and passing relatives sprawling on the furniture most days out of a year. Five chained dogs bark in the front yard and lower patio. Allen does not concern himself with the murder of Ramone, as death is no stranger in this country. Between the jungle snakes and the machete hacking, some friend or acquaintance seems to find destruction at least once a month.

Allen does not miss Ramone.

Gina comes by regularly now, to talk on the front patio. She had loved him deeply, she says, and complains that Ramone’s relatives in Florida ignore her pleas to be a part of his funeral, and also ignore the Belizean interpretation of “common law marriage.” Such a title would grant her some subsistence now, or always.

All she ever received from Ramone’s relatives is one terse letter from an estate lawyer stating she had *no* claim on the estate. *Go away . . . for you, there is zero.*

Mahee was elected again, and again. He never did wage war on the Guatemalan border, preferring the comfort of his police goon squad, and the status he has as a local supplier to the armory.

His subordinates constantly clamor for a weapon or three from the hoard, but are kept wanting by the power-hungry Mahee. With his stash of bribes (the guns), he gradually moves his status closer to the country's core government; eventually he becomes one of the elite top thugs of "public safety."

In 2016, a plane carrying two tons of cocaine emergency landed on the Southern Highway. Mahee calculated that he could advance his position substantially with 100 million dollars in snow sales. The Columbians who owned the two tons pulled ashore with a gunboat, loaded their white powder out of the police station, and shot Mahee thirty times before sailing away on the Spanish Main.

In the cool jungle under the Maya Mountains, the Monkey River chuckles past the village of San Marcos, as it has for thousands of years. Smoke wafts out the door of the Choc household. Still a thatched hut, still the dirt floor, and still neighborhood pigs poking their snout through the door-jamb in the hopes of some unaccounted for piece of trash.

Isabella still wonders what life is all about. Is it just being humped regularly by her horny husband, just tending to a pod of children, just making more corn paste to keep their tenuous existence alive? What is to become of us, now that our benefactor is gone never to return? The list for Ramone to provide sits quietly on the shelf, the order never to be filled.

Nathan still plants a hillside of corn every year, but now he also grows Mayan weed. He doesn't use it, preferring the sugar cane rum which fires up his anger and libido at the same time. A dangerous combination for Isabella. She wishes he would smoke the stuff and become pacified as are many young kids in the village. A little stupid in this guy would go a long way, she speculates.

The Mayan weed produced in a year is about ten pounds, of which he gets between eighty and a hundred dollars for. So this is, in a way, a legacy from Ramone, who always had them tracking down some other local grower. In this way, the wrestler could have a pound of stash to entice the downtown whores and generally get crazy.

The school where they met Ramone twenty years ago, when he was clear-eyed and hopeful, is now in ruins. Its walls have fallen over, and the rampant jungle swallowed almost every trace. It is another testament to the attempts of grandeur in a land where "no one get over on another."

JC settled into a cheap apartment in San Pedro, five hundred miles north of his burned-out dream. Here he hired a lawyer and produced a truckload of paper proving that the government and the officers of Punta Gorda were directly responsible for the destruction of his dream. His cries went in vain. Aside from a few polite replies, the government would not hear his case.

JC waits patiently for his wife's return, which takes a few weeks. He greets her at the airport and she is well. No mysterious pains anymore and, though she walks well as an elitist self-contained leader of the Western world, she is frail, unable to lift her bags. JC coddles her, gives her all that she asks for, and showers her with curses over his life and their predicament.

But recovery is not hard for an unlimited bank account. Rose's rich father in the north provides all the funds that are required, along with a little extra just for comfort. But no more containers of guns as, with some recent sense of morality, he now feels that arming these

“savages” in the land where his daughter lives could backfire more than it already has.

A piece of swampy shoreline is purchased on the inland bay side of San Pedro. Docks are built that encase netted ponds, these for the future residents. A small house is also built, not of the grandeur previously, but ample for their needs. The usual labor problems plague them, and most things have to be done twice or more, due to the unskilled nature of the workers. A lot of tools disappear from the job site, and some have to be re-purchased from the pawn shop where the bandits have sold them.

Over the next year, ACES is re-established in San Pedro. Though a tourist town, it is better suited to their industry, not isolated, and features an American beach of bars and colorful street meat vendors that entices their paying guests from the intelligentsia around the world.

xxii. Belize Today

Belize today is of two worlds. The first as old as the hills around them. Still full of wild pigs, jaguars, and howler monkeys in the trees. The rivers still run crystal clear, filtered by the limestone, and unmolested with the population's waste. A billion bugs jostle for position to vampire the blood of any mammal, breeding and creating new species that may never be discovered by science. The plants sing their quiet song of urgent growth, carpeting the world with their varieties, housing a thousand flowers a thousand miles from a table setting. The *chi* of life vibrates here, its soothing energy in a fog of oxygen, soothing to the most frenetic of human trespassers.

In the seaside town of Punta Gorda, nothing appears to have changed. The meat market is still full of flies, and the streets are still packed dirt trails, where people dodge reckless drivers, and half-starved dogs roam.

What has changed is the collective attitude of the people. With the advent of the personal cell phone, all that was concealed in the world is now theirs, to view on a tiny screen. Now all the commodities of the First World are laid at their feet, feet that cannot pay for this endless river of material wealth.

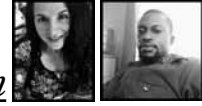
So now the people can see it, but still cannot have it. Poverty is still the ruling metric of the land. This exposure, then, only serves to fuel frustration and anger. The poor angrily resent the ex-pats for all they themselves do not have. Home attacks are up massively,

But the nature remains, and the nature has the last laugh. The plants grow to enormity, the animals leap and slither through the foliage. The sea calmly laps at the shore. Hand-sized insects creep through cracks to take up residence in the crumbling town. The bugs and buzzards do not care what is on the cell phone. They will outlast the human settlements. The buildings will fall into the sea. The wild crocodiles will hunt on the mouth of the Monkey River again.

* * * * *



Tamara Miles & John Echem



A Simple Leaf

i.

Red-leaf hunt through the hushed forests
of October in Hokkaido—
Japanese maples, ginkgoes—
and then by train to Niseko.

I go in my imagination, a volcanic flow of color—
ride down river, gaze at mountain ranges,
then sleep soundly in my glamping cabin lit by lantern.

In truth, I am on a couch in Westminster, Maryland,
my visiting Australian friend asleep nearby while I wait for sunrise—
The Pig Shed Writer's Retreat.

*My first poem for ages falls from somewhere among the castle ruins of Toyooka,
and the changing leaves of onsen trees.*

In the veins of an autumn leaf, I see the veins of my mother's hands—
tanned by the sun, withering like a wilting banana leaf.

ii.

December born, winter in my eyes, half asleep and frostbitten,
sometimes warmed by the sun that loved me, held me, rocked me,
said: *the cold won't last forever.*

Wisps of steam rise up from the ice-field,
slick with memories of yesterday—
and I here, skeleton born, overwintered on Elephant Island.

Frosty cold bites into my bones, falling firths smothering the grassland.
Weight of ice—it cracks—
I bleed in icicles, but at the core I burn.

A tickle of light on the back of my hand says *speak*.
My cracking lips, like raspberries, mutter inaudibly in the cold.

I yearn for my lover. I yearn for my home.

Too much silence has left my throat dry.
It creaks like an old floor as I open the door.

iii.

Pirouette fissures of the season in ice write poetry read in the mind.

Gray scale, pedestrian—
I wait for a choreographer.

Bought by time, placed in the grave,
wrapped in my own brown sweater, she lay.
Memories of distant glories come tormenting—
Life, like a fallen leaf discarded from its bearing by time.

Her soft red-blond hair, her muted clothes—
but sometimes green as summer, and as lush—
remembered.

Knees bent among leaves, not long,
but damp, they cling to me—
as if the kneeling wanted a continual protest.

Against the nippy fall of day, most terrible and shuddery—
such an accursed day.

The tulips of happy moments now a torment—
agonies of my doubts hung still on the clouds.

The bird decayed, cat feasted, eyes out, dressed in death,
does not remember flight—
yet I who stoop to stare, to study, then turn away, *remember.*

All day it fed on the joy of yesterday—
now the mutton of the day,
cutting winds, knifelike, rip life with no regret.

The succulent plant with thick fleshy leaves lies tan—
farfetched is love, life a thawing bud—
a simple leaf with undivided blade.

* * * * *



Bags End Book #15: It Was a Dream of Rain, Part 1

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

It Was a Dream of Rain

When this story began, it was with a dream of rain. Peaceful, yes, but this rain was inside Bags End, & Bags End seemed empty of everyone I had ever known.

Then I woke up, disturbed & confused by it all. I guess I had gotten used to dreams where I'd find strange stories to tell of, or else I would pass through to the other side to see mah dear friend Larry the Spider & the other nice guys I had met in the Creature Common.

No, this dream just upset me.

I probably would have just shook it off as one more strange dream in a low beagle's long life of them if mah dear friend Princess Crissy of Imagianna had not come 4or a visit.

Not being in her throne, Crissy was wearing blue jeans & a shirt with

Bags End News
 No. 339 September 18, 2011
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
~~Lead~~ Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

It Was a Dream of Rayn

When this storie began,
 it ~~was~~ with a dream of
 rayn. Peestull uzvelly, yess,
 deer reeds, butt this rayn
 wass insid Bagzend & Bagzend
 seemd empty of everywan
 I had evr noun.

Then I wok upp, disterbd
 & konfuzd by it. I ~~was~~ I
 had gotten uzd
 I'd gine strong
 up, or els I wd
 too thethr
 deer friend Lery
 the other wis
 in the Creech
 No, this on

Bags End News
 No. 340 September 17, 2011
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Wauking Tur up Bagzend?

Welll, I gesss ya cood saye
 wun thup & another about
 Bagzend, butt shurlee wun
 thup troo iz thatt nobody nowz
 it gwl for serten. There are
 awl sortz of partz thatt
 dont add upp lik 1 + 1 orr
 tittelz & gitalz.

Sed, mor kloselee, I wazent
 shur wat woad be tawnd too
 konfownd the mixx mor by
 the wauking tur propozd by
 nigh friend Princess Chrisakah
 of Inapianna top mee &
 that, mayer I woad be iff sheep
 cood bee King of Bagzend, Sheila
 Bunny.

Butt troo otherwiz iz thatt

a picture of me on it. O! Shucks! When she came climbing through mah bedroom window to Milne's Porch, that is, where I sat in mah comfy armchair.

"Crissy!" I cried as she hugged me in mah very seat. It's a big chair so we sat together in it. Crissy likes close sitting me too.

Now Crissy doesn't usually come to Bags End too often even tho she is its Guardian. So I was happy & curious to see her, mostly happy but curious too.

"I had a strange dream," she said without her usual Crissy smile. Ut-o.

"It was raining here in Bags End, but it was empty except 4or you," she said more.

"Hey! I didn't like that dream either," I said.

I hoped Crissy knowed what it meant or could tell me "don't worry so much," but she didn't & didn't some more.

"So we had a shared dream separately," I said, in place of a smart guy's helpful comment.

She nodded seriously. I was really missing her usual smile.

"I am not sure what we can do about a, um, dream, Crissy?"

The she smiled when I was not ready & I was glad shocked by it.

"I have an idea!"

"What?"

"Well, I want to go on a walking tour of Bags End with you."

"O. Um?"

"I haven't really walked through Bags End in a long time, maybe not ever like this. I have this feeling there are clues if we look for them."

"Clues?" I repeated uselessly, trying to keep up.

Crissy smiled & hugged me to help. It did.

"I think our dreams were messages it's up to us to decipher. Or understand. They happen in Bags End."

"When it's raining. And nobody but me." She nods.

"We need to go slowly & study what Bags End is & then I think we will understand these dreams better."

"Well, I just don't know, Crissy. I mean Bags End is a strange place once you travel it a-ways."

Crissy nodded. "I was reading some old numbers of your newspaper. About when Sheila led everyone to the top."

"Yah."

"And to the bottom, the Good Place."

"Yah," I repeated.

"And over the edge."

I nodded.

"What, Algernon?"

"Well, it's been awhile since there's been one of those expeditions."

"Does that make you sad?"

"I suppose in a way. But I mean you can never tell when one will happen."

Crissy got all excited 4or some reason. "So we can go?"

I nodded, supposing so. "But what I am wondering is a question."

"Which?"

"Well, I mean everyone has weird dreams. How do you figger which ones need some doing over?"

Crissy nodded & smiled sort of strangely at me, & thinking at the same time. Then she smiled more Crissy-like suddenly & talked. "Why not? Even if it's just a dream, it will be fun to give Bags End a closer inspection. Right?"

Well, this made sense to me. I mean these separate shared dreams could

mean something, & Crissy wasn't a guy to get worked up too easy like some, so I guessed if she wanted to do this, it was something worth doing. So I hushed mah old doubts & smiled new.

"Do we need those strange amplifying glasses like Sherlock Holmes?"

Crissy shook her head laughing. "No, we just need to use our good noggins to do the work."

I nodded mah, er, noggin. "Where do we start?"

Crissy put her finger on her chin, & was quiet like thinking.

Then she looked at me with what I figured would be a bright idea.

"Where would you start if you didn't think about it?"

"Sheila's Throne Room," I said, not thinking about it, & listening to mahself afterward. O. Hm.

Crissy smiled & nodded & stood up. "Let's go!"

Now I wasn't sure what I had meant, & would have maybe argued with mahself some more if I could have figgered out how, but Crissy was already climbing through mah bedroom window from Milne's Porch back to Bags End. So I did what I do best. I followed & tried to pay attention.

Crissy is one of those big guys who doesn't really act like one. Like most do. But Sheila likes her & that calms things down some. Like coming into her Throne Room when she's listening to some good jazz on her fonograff, & slouching down in her throne crunching a carrot. O! Yuk!

An annoyed look at me gave way to a pleased look at Crissy. And hugs. Who would not hug Crissy? Sheila is nobody's fool. And she likes good hugs.

So I played it safe & sat on my matt in the corner near her throne.

Now this, Dear Readers, is where it got weird. After telling the dream to Sheila, the one we both had about me all alone in Bags End & raining, Crissy asked her what she thought.

"I had it too," she said. Then she looked at me annoyed like it was mah idear.

"Hey! I didn't do it or like it either!" Feeling ridiculous 4or defending mahself from a dream I seemed to be in all over, like a popular song. Um.

"I will come with you. Hopping, of course," she decided.

Crissy liked this idea a lot & I figgered it just figgered. Who wouldn't want to walk anywhere with Crissy? At least I was still invited.

I still can't say what comes next but I guess this is one renegade dream we gotta chase around.

Walking Tour of Bags End?

Well, I guess you could say one thing & another about Bags End, but surely one thing true is that nobody knows it all 4or certain. There are all sorts of parts that don't add up like 1+1 or fiddles & guitars.

Said more closely, I wasn't sure what would be found to confound the mix more by the walking tour proposed by mah friend Princess Crissy of Imagianna to me & that Mayor & would-be-if-she-could-be King of Bags End, Sheila Bunny.

But true otherwise is that the three of us had all dreams of me alone in Bags End & it was raining.

Princess Crissy thought we should look for clues. Sheila strangely agreed but maybe she was just restless 4or a new expedition anyway.

And strangely too be4or we had taken a step outside her Throne Room, Sheila had gone & fetched her BunnyCycle Beatrix!

"How is that walking, Sheila?" I asked as she got on her seat & put on her purple helmet with the crown on it.

"I don't walk, Beagle. I hop. This is hopping in style!"

Hoo boy. Crissy put on her helmet & rided behind Sheila. And me? The guy whose strangely shared dream caused this sorta-now-walking tour? Well, Beatrix has a side car for the likes of me to cower in. I was buckled in tightly too, so when we crashed I wouldn't fly off & miss any of the fun.

"Safety first, Beagle," Sheila grouched at me as she put on her riding goggles & Crissy made sure I was kissed to mah strapped-down-ness.

Off we roared! Er, hopped!

Then a Crissy word & we stopped again. Crissy decided since we were going without an announcement or trumpet blow that we should leave a note for any wondering. She later told me she writed a little note & pinned it to Sheila's Thone which said in a Sheila-like voice:

Wawking Tour of Bagzend
with Crissy & the beegel
bakK sumner or later.
Wel, gudbye. Yorking 

That seemed about right & so Take 2 now again, off we roared!

I wasn't sure where our hop-walking tour of Bags End would start but Sheila did manage to rode us from the usual levels & hallways of Bags End without notice & we hop-walk-toured up quite a few ramps to level after level, not slowing for nothing.

Sheila had a place in mind & we finally stopped touring up & up levels & roared through a hallway to a door she chose & on in.

It was a forest right away, & Sheila & Crissy got off, so I figured OK, we're gonna walk again.

There was a path through the forest tho nobody was around. Winter & chilly. I wondered at it all but pretty.

Eventually, we came to a place with a bench & we sat together looking toward a big sky above a grassy wet place.

"This is a marsh," Crissy explained to me. "It's very wet & I think the water running through is from the Wide Wide Sea. You can smell Sea salt in the air."

I sniffed & could.

I waited too 4or Sheila's word on this all. It came in her own time.

"I think this is somewhere near the part of the White Woods my family comes from. I feel something here I haven't since then."

She meant how she & her sister Lory & twin Sharon & mommy Pat & daddy Pete lived in a forest, known mostly at the White Woods, talklessly be4ore they were given talking & thinking, & come to Bags End. This was a long time ago, now but still important as history.

"How did you find this place?" Crissy asked curiously. Sheila had taken her place on Crissy's lap but, be4ore mah jealous bone could rear up, Crissy had put me in her lap too. Sheila nudged 4or mah Ear Blanket 4or her comfort & to justify mah place in such ease.

Bags End News
 No. 341 September 24, 2011
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Deepr intoo thee Woodz!

I hav bin tellin thee strang &
 gettin longr storee that began with
 the dream ut rayn haded by mee,
 Shlela Buny & Princess Crissy
 itt Bagzend was
 mee & itt was

Crissy, ka
 havin thee dree
 found out that
 same dream nu
 Bigg, gys lik' bee
 & cherrin both
 Enyway,
 a wawking fun
 wich, Shlela &
 turned intoo the
 Bagzend & awff

Bags End News
 No. 342 October 1, 2011
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Whooz Woodz Ar Theezccc

Welll, now, hear yor old
 pall Algernon, upp too hiz
 humke better snill in shnozolla
 in ad venchur. Fom a shere
 dream mee & Shlela Buny &
 Princess Crisy haded ut rayn
 in Bagzend &
 & wee dream
 to stranglee
 wawking fer
 takin onn S
 Beekxx, hap
 Goes yu coo
 Team too nite
 strang. Wit
 thee storee
 Thee nit

Bags End News
 DOUBLE ISSUE!
 No. 343-344 October 8-15, 2011
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Deepr Intoo Thee Whit Woodz!

When I wok upp from mah
 dream ut rayn, I felt strang
 & kind of sad. Bagzend was
 empty butt for mee & thee rayn.
 That dream turnz out was
 haded by mah adoptid sister
 Shlela Buny & mah deer friend
 ut mencee kinds, Princess Crisy.
 As I hav bin tellin inn mah
 nitez pap, wee sett awff onn
 a hopwawking ferr ut Bagzend
 too look for whoz wich dz thee
 thingz doo ledd uss too somweez
 stranger than thinkd thiss tim
 could thee Whit Woodz.
 Ut Butt still mor, deer readerz.
 Ut cars still mor thee ferst

Sheila closed one purple eye & looked up toward the wispy cloud blue sky, thinking.

"I don't know 4or sure," she said. "A dream? A scent when I was riding one day? I hadn't even rided 4or awhile so I don't know that either. But here I was, like we just came, & I found myself sniffing more than thinking, & this was strange but OK."

Crissy nodded. This was a long explanation 4or Sheila. I wondered what that had to do with our dreams of rain, tho it was nice here anyway.

"I don't come from Bags End, Beagle," Sheila said quietly, like she had borrowed mah book of thoughts & read it though. I nodded to be on the safe side.

"You don't either. And you came later than me. What I can't figger out is what your dream was saying about--"

Sheila would have said more but there was a noise & all these geese birds went flying over us, high up & squawking crazy. We watched but I noticed Sheila's nose was twitching almost like a Rabbit's. Hmm.

Then she talked some more. "I got the feeling that this place & our dream are connected. I don't know. But that's why we came."

This made some sense. But that twitching nose part still bothered me some.

"We can't go through that marsh. Too wet. I just wanted to make sure I still got the old feeling," Sheila said.

"Do you?" asked Crissy quietly.

Sheila nodded & hopped off lap & bench in one hop. "Now we figger how to go deeper in."

We made our way back to Beatrix. Along the way through the trees, Crissy pointed out a little hovel of sticks & leaves leaning against one tree, like someone had lived there. Strange. Then she pointed up on a tree to some pine cones hanging on pieces of rope. They were covered in little red & yellow dots.

"What are those, Crissy?"

"You don't want to know, Algernon."

"I am a beagleboy journalist guy. It's mah job to know."

Crissy squatted down to mah shortness & said, "Those are bird seed feeders."

"O! Yuk!" I cried. I tried to run for daylight but Crissy caught me up & helded me firm but nicely till I calmed down & we were much farther along. Even nice 4orists have trouble 4or a soul.

We got back to Beatrix & all strapped in good. Sheila didn't ride us off right away. She just looked far, her nose twitching & sniffing.

Deeper into the Woods!

I was pushing mah brainbone to understand these strange things going on. I remembered the time that Farmer Jones, back in his worst days of badness, had broke the Stays-Is & your old pal Algernon had started going Dog with all that barking & licking & so on. I tolded about all this back in Bags End Book #6: The Grand Scheme of Liberation. This was I guess a little like that with Sheila going Rabbit, but we were also near the White Woods where she had been a Rabbit a long time ago!

And so I dunno about that but what about those strange White Woods? I remember being there with mah Creature Common friend Larry the Spyder,

that time we helped that, um, oneironaut Benny Big Dreams to wake up the Beast & save the White Woods.

These woods were a little white, it seemed. Were they getting whiter as we rode along? Was this Dreamland where I had spent so much time both trapped & helping?

So were mah thinkings as we rode along in Beatrix BunnyCycle. I wasn't sure if these were thinkings to be talked out loud or not. I decided to just keep a weathered eye out 4or too many white trees, & also see if Sheila kept getting more Rabbit than Bunny.

It was a long ride we were on & I began to think Sheila was looking 4or something. Then I noticed that Crissy was sniffing too! But when she looked at me, it was with her usual tricky smile, & besides what else would she be than a Princess? People-folks only match up with other people-folks.

I wondered if I should be sniffing too. Many have observed that your old pal Algernon has one big schnozola, which is a funny but not mean word for nozebone. But I have never thought about it too much save maybe when there is food dangerously close by. O! Yuk!

But I guess in the wild places, nozebones are more important. Maybe you can smell out dangers other than food. I decided to try because I thinked the unsniffed danger is worse than smelling & fleeing.

So while riding fast along, I took a big sniff & nearly fell from mah seat! I didn't know what to think. And, strangely, I didn't think 4or a moment. I just sniffed & sniffed.

But it wasn't like that time with Jones tricking me & battling Betsy. This sniffing was by mah choice to help out my friends & Bags End. It was OK & I felt mah thinkings put on some weird clothes again. Just different ones. Pajamoz? Or made of leaves & treebarks? I did not know but it was not bad in its strange.

Was this what it had been like 4or Sheila & her family living in these Woods? No wonder they didn't talk! There was a lot to sniff, & they had each other to hug. And I guess there were lots of noises to check on. And I guess, even more trembly, that they got their carrots somehow too. O! Yuk!

It wasn't like I wanted to go all woodsy & talkless. And nobody was making me. But as I kept sniffing, I see'd the world in a different way. I was curious, not scared. I let mahself calm down more than I do usually when I am along on one of these grate exxxpeditions.

I smelled the dirt, & all kinds of leaves &, I confess, even the nuts & fruits did not make me cry out. They were part of things too. Not there to chase or mock or confuse me. Now I don't say there could not be attack fruits or nuts. O! Possible Yuk! but not these.

I thinked about mah dream & how the three of us ended up riding together through these White Woods because we had the dream of rain, & how Sheila had found this place by sniffing. It almost felt planned but I really didn't know that much.

I did have a question tho finally for Sheila which I kept to mahself till it got dark.

I stayed shivery solid in mah rider's side-seat until Sheila & Crissy had had their dinner. O! Yuk! Then, when Crissy assured me it was done, I camed with her to our camping spot.

There, among the White Woods--yes, it was them but different too, maybe not the Dreamland part, but some other part, with smells--we had a tent & a campfire. It was nice & the stars above too, tho no Bunny Star in sight yet. I asked mah question. I even thinked of 2.

"Sheila, is this White Woods where you & the other Bunnys come from?"

She was slouch comfortable against Crissy's lap, & I was a matching slouch on the other side. I think she grumped something like "yes."

"Are we going to your old home?" asked Crissy, who doesn't get grumps from Sheila.

"I think so," Sheila said, unsure. Unsure? I decided to ask mah other question right away.

"Why have you never gone back before now, Sheila?" I asked.

How can a quiet be grumpy? But it was. I think she was more mad at not knowing & I got caught up in it.

"I didn't know how! And I don't know why now, but here we are."

"Are we close?"

Sheila was done being interviewed. No more words, she hopped into the tent & hunkered down in her traveling royal bed. I think Miss Chris made it for her one time.

Crissy put on her R.E.M. pajamoz & got me comfortable. Then she put out the campfire with lots of dirt & water.

"Safety first," she said, with her tricky Crissy smile.

Whose Woods Are These . . .

The night seemed over with us all in our tent & clustered close. But maybe not. I remember feeling warm & drowsy, & I was close to dozing, when I looked up & saw there was a little roof window in the tent. I could see a little square of sky & stars through it.

But the sky wasn't its usual colors, no sir. The sky was white, not black, & the stars were black, not white!

I blinked. I blinked twice. I could have blinked for a career & nothing undid those backwards colors.

Hmm. And OK. But still. Was I dreaming? Not sure, even with all the blinking going on.

Was it tricks done by the White Woods? I tried to remember mah last time there, & maybe it was tricks. But that was Dreamland! Was this? Was I too tangled in these words?

Then suddenly a face I was sure I think I knowed through the roof window. Um. O. Benny Big Dreams?

He smiled friendly 4or a strange fella. "Remember me?"

"Yah, guy. I helped you that time," I was annoyed & I didn't know why.

"Now it's my turn," he said, & he was still friendly. Your old pal Algernon is not immune to friendly smiles.

"You're going to tell me what that dream of rain is about?"

"Well, not exactly."

"I thought so. You will probably help in some tangled up tricky big guy way that only sorta helps." Boy! I was not wanting to get nice-tricked despite mah basically mushy Beagle heartbone!

"There are things I can tell you about these White Woods that will help you."

"Is this just Dreamland again?"

Benny was quiet 4or a moment which surprised me, but OK.

"Not exactly. They have their own angle on things."

"So you're not native here."

"No. But I know some things if you want me to tell you."

I nodded & wondered why we were talking but Crissy & Sheila were

sleeping peaceful next to me still.

"I have a friend who can help guide you."

"A friend?" I said suspiciously.

"These Woods will lead you lost or anywhere else they want you to go."

"O." This made sense.

"There are invisible paths that can be followed if you know their songs."

"O," I repeated. I was now wishing Sheila & Crissy were awake since this was getting kind of beyond mah simple brainbone's capacities.

"Don't put yourself down. You can listen now & do just fine."

"Why tell me & not mah smart sleeping friends too?"

"I am returning your favor. You helped Dreamland. We are friends in a special way."

"That's why they don't wake up? I am dreaming & not, both?"

He nodded.

"Why are the stars black & the sky white?"

He laughed, which surprised me. "One of the games here, I think. I don't know all the answers to give you."

I nodded OK. That seemed true. Nobody knows it all, not even a strange oneironautical fellow.

"Who is your friend? How will we find him?" I said too quickly because it seemed like Benny was fading a bit. Maybe he can't stay too long here. Maybe it's a trick. Maybe both.

"You will encounter him tomorrow. He may seem strange & unhelpful at first."

I laughed.

"And it may not be him. These Woods are full of trickeries."

Ut-o.

"You have to ask him a question to know 4or sure it's him."

"Which one?"

Benny paused. Faded a little more. I hoped he'd hurry.

"Ask him to whisper in your ears which food you like."

I nearly jumped & runned. "Nobody knows that, pal!"

"If he is right, that's my friend, & he can help you find the right Song Path."

Still upset, I said, "What's that?"

"The invisible paths through these Woods. Each has a song to help you follow them. You can't see the path, but the song's words will guide you along your way."

Now Benny was almost gone from mah sight.

I nodded but it still bothered me that some unknown friend of Benny Big Dreams who lives in these White Woods would know what mah only liked food is.

I thinked one more question since I was running out of chance.

"So we're even now, Benny? I won't see you no more?"

He laughed but it was a nice laugh. Nicer.

"We're friends. That's what friends do for each other. I feel glad & honored to know you & can help you this time."

O. Hmm. But now he was faded & I noticed that the sky was blk & the stars were white again. O. Hmm. Again.

What to think? I really didn't know. I just layed there quiet & still trying to remember every word Benny had said.

What would I tell Crissy & Sheila when they waked up in the morning? I didn't think they would doubt me but I felt uneasy about the whole thing.

Mah travels in Dreamland filled many pages of mah newspaper (which I told a lot about in mah Bags End Book #11: Algernon Beagle Wakes Up!), & I was long in getting back & short in any explanations.

I decided I would sleep & maybe mah brainbone in the morning would think the right thoughts 4or it all.

I listened to Sheila's & Crissy's deep breathing, & it was very peaceful, & I guess after awhile I slept.

Deeper into the White Woods!

I do not dispute this is a good exxxpedition tale to be tangled up in, but I will wonder with mah own take on grumpyness about why some strange friend of Benny Big Dreams & mah one liked food have to get mixed up in all this?

Ah well, I sigh. As I said, I fell asleep after mah talk with Benny, & then did I not fall into that same dream of rain!

I tried to be brave & know it better this time. Tucked away mah terror best I could.

Raining. Steady like. Not a sprinkle but not too crazy I think. Like a rain that has moved in to stay awhile.

And just me to get wet. How did I know this? I just did like I guess anybody knows things in dreams, just so. Bags End felt empty of mah friends & sort-of friends & really-not-friends-in-any-friendly-way-at all, & others too. The many we had met on the many exxxpeditions over the long times.

There were those old men we met who were brung to Bags End by some mysterious fella who pretended to them that Sheila was a myth. They learned better, but Sheila let them stay anyway.

And those strange hippys we meeteed in the New Good Place. I always wondered how they were doing.

And that time over the edge of Bags End that became the Season of Lights holiday somehow both.

None of that was here, & nothing else too. Just me & the rain & I felt helpless to argue.

So I waked up from that dream now feeling twice defeated into sad by it.

But this was strange. Mah body felt damp & not the sweaty kind but the rainy kind! Was this dream trying to follow me out? What would this mean?

And then I saw that Sheila & Crissy weren't in the tent & I panicked & cried out.

"Algernon!"

"Beagle!"

They said in their nice Crissy & annoyed Sheila voices just outside the tent.

I crawled out trying not to whimper at it all.

"We let you sleep a little extra," Crissy said with her usual smiling way.

"Did you dream it again too?"

Sheila looked at Crissy & she looked back.

"What?" I demanded bigger than I am, but scareder too.

"We were just saying to each other how neither of us dreamed last night at all," said Sheila quieter than she usually is.

Without thinking about it, all the packing up they were doing stopped,



& we sat on the grass in a circle.

I had no reason not to, so I told them about mah sorta dream talk with Benny, & then mah strange but sorta rerun dream of the rain.

They listened close to mah words & I tried to get them all right.

"He didn't say anymore about his friend?" asked Crissy, patting mah headbone nicely.

I shooked it but not enough to interrupt her pattings. I needed them especially much.

Sheila snorted. "Benny. Figgers." I think she knows him some other way than I do. Some more big guy way.

Crissy has never met Benny even though she told me that Dreamland borders Imagianna. "Over a hill. That way," she had said to me, & pointed.

I braved up a question.

"Was it like this when you lived here, Sheila?"

She was quiet but not the grumpy kind like before.

"I don't remember those days like I remember Bags End ones, Beagle," she said softly. I noticed her nose was twitching a little.

"But the farther we go, the more I remember kinds of things that might help us," she said & then got up & hopped over to Beatrix the BunnyCycle to finish packing. Hmm. Maybe twice.

Once that tent & the rest were packed, we drove off. I wondered what the day would bring, & was worrying all sorts when Crissy waved me to see her friendly beagle-loving smile. That helped mah hopes good like every time.

So off we roarthoptoured in the Beatrix. I don't think there is another like her anywhere the way she goes along. I'm no fan of fast but, if no choice in the matter, I think Beatrix is the finest of the fast.

I began to sniff again like the first day, & these sniffings were more, like a bigger hill, or maybe hole, but I didn't know which, just more.

And mah sniffings told me that others were sniffing back which made me more jittery. 2-way sniffings seemed like trouble just close by & waiting.

But I kept sniffing & I began to get less jittery because the sniffings were not really scary. Most of them. They were curious, "who are you?" sorts of sniffings. "What brings you to the One Woods today?"

"One Woods?" I wondered. I thought they were White Woods, but maybe I was confused.

I would have tried to talk to the sniffing askers but I didn't think just mah nozebone & some words would do.

Now Sniff language is strange, but I want to assure my Dear Readers that it is not made up like mah silly brother Alexander's Bump language. I just don't know its right ways too good. So I just sniffed & tried to learn.

We roarthoptoured all through the day. I thinked Sheila was very anxious to get where we were going. She & Crissy were both sniffing & twitching more. The Crissy twitching part was strange because she isn't a Bunny or x-Rabbit or nothing.

When it got to be dark, we had to stop. Another reason too. The road we rided on was gone. We were at the edge of White Woods that was too thick to ride through.

So we set up our camp & our tent again. Nobody talked too much. We sniffed tho, & twitched, even your old pal Algernon.

We didn't put up the tent either. Instead we gathered some long sticks & leaned them against a tree like a little hut, & then covered them in leaves. Why did this seem familiar somehow?

Sheila went up to Beatrix & said something. Beatrix shook left & right

some, almost like saying no, & then slowly drove off the way we had come. I didn't ask Sheila about it. We had to walk from here on.

4or a long time we sat in a kind of cluster, watching the big black sky of stars. Seems like the One Woods or White Woods can do the colors either way.

I was feeling too many wordless things to say. But I could think still too.

The best I could figger is that we were going back to where Sheila & her family had been a bunch of Rabbits a long time ago. As we got closer, we were all getting more Rabbit, even me & Crissy, which I did not understand.

Somehow this was how we were going to understand our dream of rain. This didn't make too much sense, but Sheila was bravely leading us on a hunch.

It got late & cold & we crawled into the little leaning hut & clustered together. I wondered what I would dream & if they wouldn't again. I was tired & worried, but more tired, because soon I slept.

I think. I mean, I don't know because, when I opened mah eyes, nothing felt dream strange, & I think I really could hear the voice calling mah name.

"Sonnyboy? Sonnyboy? Come on out & say hello to your dear old Mommy Beagle."

I crawled out, & there was mah dear old longlost Mommy Beagle, looking at me smiling.

"Um. This is one of Benny's tricks," I said, suddenly wordsy again & now grumpy too.

Mommy Beagle laughed her nice old laugh. "Nonsense! Stuff & nonsense, I say!" She was smiling though.

"Maybe," I said.

"You're worried 4or your friends, aren't you?" she asked very nicely. Mah heartbone was ready to believe, but mah skeptical brainbone shook mah head no.

"These Woods are full of trickeries, & you are one of them," I declared.

"I know where Sheila is going, & I can show you the way. But you don't trust me." She sounded sad.

But I shook mah head no.

Then she moved nicely toward me & it was strange but I let her. And then she whispered in mah earbone what mah one kind of favorite food is.

I made to leap away.

"I should know what it is. I fed it to you be4ore I had to go away. And I told Crissy what it was or you never would have trusted & stayed with her."

I paused in mah leap.

"And Miss Chris & Sheila know too or you never would have been so close to them too."

Now I just waited 4or more to come if it was coming.

"Do you believe me now?" she asked, still smiling as nicely as ever.

I did the only thing I had left. I sniffed. Mommy Beagle twitched strangely.

"You're not mah Mommy Beagle, but you are Benny's friend," I said quietly.

"He said you were smart."

I nodded.

"So you know I am here to help you," she said.

"How?" I asked. I still felt unsure. I mean, it made more sense to do it this way, but it was like these Woods couldn't help but trick a little at least.

"Let me show you the way to where you are going."

"Now? Can I get Crissy & Sheila?"

"No. I need to bring you there alone & then you can show them the way."

"Why?"

"Someone will lead each of them there too."

"Does Benny have more than one friend or are you more than one of you?"

Not-Mommy Beagle laughed & said, "You are a sharp tack, Sonnyboy!"

I was getting mad but tried to keep mah calm. "I am glad you are helping us but you're not mah Mommy Beagle to call me Sonnyboy."

Mommy Beagle nodded but strangely looked sad. Then we started though the Woods & almost right away Not-Mommy Beagle started to sing.

O yes, the Song Path Benny told me about.

It was a strange song & singed in Mommy Beagle's own real voice best I could remember it. I would have got mad but then I thinkd maybe if you show up looking like someone as hard as you can, then you can't just stop all at once. OK then. Some.

It was a looking & finding song & I don't know how to say it better than that. But I saw that every time we made a turn, or maybe came to a certain place, the song would change. It wasn't exactly as easy as that but I was watching closely.

The stars were their usual color, & there was a big moon above the tall trees, so we had some light to walk by. Not-But-Sorta-Like-Mommy Beagle singed & singed, but there were no words, at least the English kind that I know.

But what would I find there or do with what I found? And how would I get back to mah friend when I didn't know the Song?

I guess I kept going because I wanted to trust Benny, & I wanted to help Sheila, & I hoped it would all tie back to the dream of rain & me alone in Bags End. It was mah choice to do this. No tricks.

We came to a big clearing in the trees with so much moonlight it was like a nice bath, strange to tell. We walked on our short Beagle & sorta-Beagle legs into the clearing, & then stood quiet for a moment.

"What now?" I asked.

Sorta-Mommy Beagle said quietly, "I am not sure. But this is where the Song ends." And then she evaporated in the moonlight!

I was alone. I was far from Sheila & Crissy in these tricky White Woods, & I did not know the Song to bring me back.

If I was really going Dog again, like that other time, I might have whimpered or even howled my worry & fear. But words were still in mah head. A few certain ones especially.

Wait. Pay attention. Trust Benny. Even trust that Sorta-Mommy Beagle.

Then I saw coming toward me the wonderful sight of Princess Crissy!

I was excited, then not.

"Are you more trickeries?"

Crissy smiled her inimitable tricky smile & came right up to hug me like her privilege. Which it is 4or the real one, of course. She didn't use words, which is why I thinkd to believe her.

"Did someone bring you here too?" I asked.

Crossy smiled happy & sad both. "It was my friend I told you about. The one who went away."

"Was & wasn't, right?"

She nodded.

Then a noise & Sheila Bunny come hopping up to us! Crissy hugged her good & even I did a little in mah gladness.

"Who brung you, Sheila?" I asked, like we were the oldest of chatting chums.

But she didn't even glare or grump at me.

"We're very close. This is where things changed. When we left the Woods that night."

"Do you know the rest?" asked Crissy.

Sheila nodded. "I think so." She pointed her paw. "We lived in that direction. Not far."

We didn't have our camping supplies or Beatrix anymore. It was just the 3 of us in this strange place. And, weirdly, none of our noses were twitching no more. I don't think we were even sniffing.

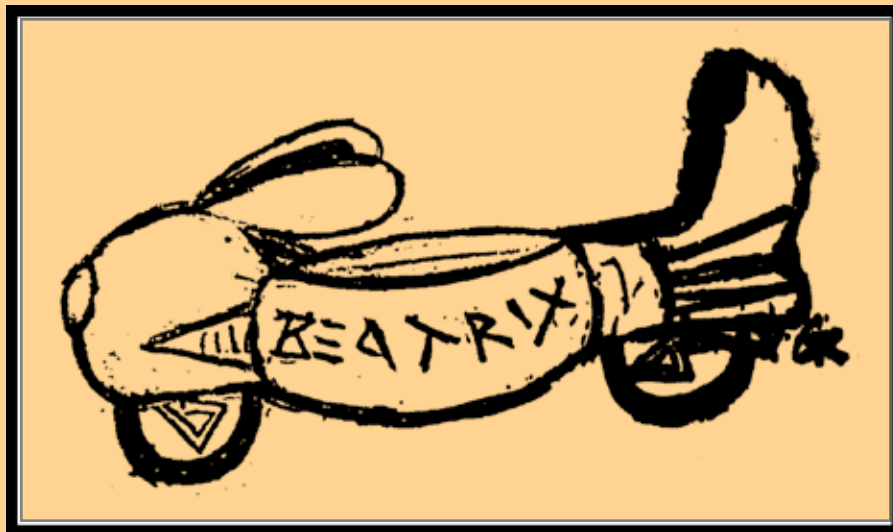
Our walking tour had come to its goal, & we were close together walking across the strangely shaped clearing of moonlight, toward where Sheila & her family had lived so long ago.

Then, very lightly, it started to rain.

Read Part 2 in [Cenacle](#) | 111 | April 2020!



* * * * *



G. Rodriguez

Judih Haggai

past mid-december
slow approach towards year's end
no reason to rush

* * *

last month of the year
fill 'er up with energy
recycle love

* * *

days pile on days
what is different this year?
lost belief, new hope

* * *

breathe in breathe out
moon rises sun rises
yin flows into yang

* * *

taste of persimmon
saturday morning breakfast
and now, memory

* * *

the road a spiral
grass with puddles and rocks
experience each step

* * *

life under ceasefire
strange resemblance to war
careful, incoming

* * *

jihad says *ceasefire*
we wait for rocket attacks
same well-traveled path

* * *

Kindness Day, today
chance to stop rocket attacks
—just a suggestion

* * *

more night-time rockets
friends call out for empathy
music first-aid

* * *

life so delicate
days of war, peace, sorrow, joy
let's choose love

* * *

winter sunshine
all anxieties dissolve
sensation of peace

* * * * *



Green Star Soup

[Travel Journal]

Jade towers under lapis lazuli sky, San Pedro is a tall, modestly-branching, nearly spineless cactus, widespread in the Andes. Its Quichua name is *wachuma*, giving rise to the Spanish verb *chumar*, to trip, and the English verb I invented, *to choom*. San Pedro is what gave Quebec François thundering choom-visions of butterflies and sky-webs. Surrounding San Pedro's white, woody core, I understood from my reading, is a thick layer of peyote-like emerald flesh packed with mescaline. I kept seeing San Pedros in the front of banks, and in traffic circles, and imagining spiriting them away in the dead of night and brewing them up. But I knew that would be morally wrong and psychologically disastrous. And what if the *policia* turned on their disco lights and sirens as I sprinted down an avenue, a nine-foot cactus balanced on my shoulder like a Tagaeri spear?

So I asked Rumi and Ché if they knew where I could buy a San Pedro. When in doubt, employ capital. They said they had an idea where some are sold.

They told their mom I planned to brew a brew. She told a Colombian friend, and the friend, María, wanted to drink with us. We could drink at her house half an hour from Quito. I said sure.

Rumi and I got in Elvis, his 1967 red Ford Taurus, and rattled off down the hill, coasting much of the way, to a highway and thence a roadside plant store in the outlying town of Cumbaya, where I bought a two-and-a-half-meter spiny green column for \$3.50. I butchered it with a knife they had there and packed it into plastic bags in Elvis's trunk. We rattled back up to Guapulo, Elvis straining hard to get us up the hills. Fortunately, Rumi takes good care of his brakes. Literal brakes, anyway. His metaphorical ones could use a tune-up.

Next day, I got up early to brew the cactus in the kitchen of the Hostal Labirinto. I was a bit apprehensive about sharing it with people who might not take it seriously. But my life in Guapulo is integrated with the lives of the Labirinto guys, I rationalized. We live together, sharing food, weed, and ideas. This would be a contribution from me to the collective. The kitchen was next to the rooms where Rumi, Ché, and Mauro were slumbering through their hangovers. As I chopped the cactus, I could hear them grumbling, turning over, putting pillows over their heads.

Roiling in the boiling water, the cactus cross sections were seven-pointed stars.

Fasting, unwashed, unshaven, I whispered, *Great Spirit, thank you for this soup of green stars. Please give us good, strong visions. Grant me a vision and the power to heal myself and others. Heal us all and show us how to live better.*

I wanted to make sure it was going OK, so I dipped into it.

Yes, it seemed quite OK. Sour and deep green; tasting me as I tasted it. We greeted each other again and for the first time.

*Cool and pointless,
the lavender walls
reverberate to the pulse of the Andes
as the Earth falls pointlessly around the Sun.
And though I've never done this before,
I'm doing it again.*

Rumi, Ché, and Mauro appear, adorned with haloes and trails. I say, “Stay off food and pot if you wanna drink later. You gotta be empty and pure for the full effect.”

They say, “OK.”

Ché ventures off to deal with laundry. Rumi and Mauro retire to Rumi's room, from which, anon, a rogue breeze brings a rank whiff of weed-smoke. “Stay off that stuff, you assholes!” I yell. They laugh. I open the window. I don't want to smell that now.

I clean the kitchen and sing over the brew.

At four in the afternoon, the limp green stars come out and get thrown in the trash with a prayer of farewell. I keep the brew boiling to reduce and thicken it. Mysteriously, the spines have dissolved. I can't find even a single one. I guess we'll drink them.

Just before sunset, María shows up, middle-aged, tan, bubbly, chattering, along with someone else I haven't met before. Noni, a brown-haired, milk-skinned, blue-eyed Quitenian girl all dressed in black, with a bat skull, of all things, on a thong around her neck. She barely acknowledges me, a northern Neanderthal squatting on the kitchen floor, until I conclude the brew is done, and shower and shave and put on a clean shirt. Then I become elegant and handsome.

We speed in María's tiny car along the serpentine highway. I sit in the middle of the back seat, cradling the screwed-shut plastic pitcher of warm brew on my lap, my long legs sticking through into the front. Mauro is on my left, Rumi on my right. To the left of my feet is María, driving, and to the right of them, Ché with Noni on his lap. She's gorgeous.

Shrieking with laughter, María chatters like a monkey with Ché and Noni, driving twice as fast as necessary, paying no attention to the swiftly-curving road that she clearly knows like the crease of her own cunt.

In the back seat with me, Mauro and Rumi are alarmed but philosophical.

As María's car swerves left, mashing him against me and me against Rumi, Mauro says, “Gentlemen, suppose we do die now. I invite you to consider the possibility that it is no problem at all. A spiritual perspective sees no difference between life and death, which is only another phase in the evolution of our eternal souls.” The car swerves right. The centrifugal force mashes me against him and Rumi against me.

“Correct, my cousin,” proclaims Rumi in my left ear. “If we die, not even death itself will stop us. We'll just keep on riding until we get to María's house, in whatever dimension we find it.” The car swerves left again, mashing me against him and Mauro against me.

“We have to face death all the time anyway, in whatever we do!” notes Mauro, and the car swerves right again, pushing me against him. “The important thing is to go forward with faith and happiness!”

“Amen, my cousin!—Ah, she's turning off the road.”

Moments later, the tiny car is parking like a sparrow alighting on a branch, and we're stepping (alive, it seems) into María's house, a miniature, vast, ornate mansion, quiet and

welcoming. We fan out and explore.

Upstairs, I'm surrounded by scintillating patterns—tapestries from Ecuador, and mats from Zanzibar, where María once lived—woven windows on wavy worlds. It occurs to me again that each pattern is a translation into physical form of a mental state, an image someone had in their head, a specific dimension to which they were linked when they imagined it.

A hand-woven Quichua tapestry with an image of a jolly three-headed god covers the back of a recliner chair next to a radio that's been left on. I sit on the chair embraced by the god's open arms and hear news in English from Ecuador and the rest of the world on an evangelical station. Yesterday in Nigeria, three missionaries were attacked with machetes and wounded. I turn off the radio and stand up and keep moving.

Noni and I venture onto a balcony and look out at the night world of smooth oceanic black and distant glimmering lights. Quietness and cool mountain air flow around us.

"It's so peaceful here," I murmur.

"I wouldn't want much more in life than a place like this," she murmurs.

María's voice calls, "Where are you two?"

We glide inside. Draped over a trunk is the stripy skin of a tiger.

María says, "They're building a fire downstairs."

I point to the skin. "Where did you get that?"

"A friend gave it to me. The tiger died of a drug overdose in a zoo in Colombia."

Of course. In Colombia, even the tigers are junkies. Noni and I stare. The skin ripples with the afterimages of life. Everything's haunted, really.

We glide downstairs and remove our shoes. Firelight flickers on the living room wall. Ché is adding a log to the fire. Fragrant, resinous pine wood pops and hisses. Above the semicircular fireplace rests a multiethnic collection of wooden masks belonging to María's Australian husband, a United Nations of the spirit realm. Next to the fire sits a fine ceramic piece: a contemporary reproduction of an ancient, local statue of a meditating shaman, deeply drawn into himself, power radiating outward through his narrowed eyes and posture.

Electronic trance music warbles from the CD player.

Sitting on the ledge of the fireplace with my back to the warm fire, I send round a glass of green again and again.

Mauro and Noni lie in front of me, facing each other. He flirts with her. She laughs at him, not buying it, not displeased. I rest one foot on her hip and the other on his, talking down to them, making them laugh.

We all sit in a semicircle round the gorgeous, slurring fire, a grandparent telling incomprehensible stories in whispers and lights and pops and fragrances. We humans are kind of melding into one multiple-warm-bodied life-form. It occurs to me that there are either six or eight of us. Seven seems unlikely. I'm disinclined to count. I think I could get up to about one before getting distracted.

"What have you used your hands for, in this life?" I ask Noni, curious about those white beings curled like nudes on her black lap.

She says, "Well . . . I'm ashamed to admit this, but one thing I've done is, I killed lizards and frogs for dissection when I was a biology student at the Catholic University. We studied life by killing it! Can you see how ironic that is? I couldn't accept it, so I got out of there and started working for the city's botanical gardens. Now I plant plants with my hands." She holds them up for all to see.



Mauro says, “Noni, is it just you, or is it getting hot in here? People, I’m overheating in my shirt and pants.” In one fluid motion, lying on his back, he strips to his shiny emerald bikini briefs, and limbers up, stretching, lifting his feet, then his hands, to the ceiling—a strong young man in love with his body.

María says, “*Hombre*, if the cooking doesn’t work out, I’ll give you ten thousand sucres for those arms of yours to help me carry groceries and weed the garden!”

The conversation evolves into a series of jokes about auctioning off parts of our bodies—María’s shapely 49-year-old legs (I bid twenty thousand sucres); my not-too-muscular but all-right torso (María bids five thousand); Ché’s hands, skilled at pottery and cooking (Noni bids thirty thousand).

Still lying on his back, Mauro raises his legs in the air again, praises their shape, their muscles. But he can’t get any bidders.

“Nathan,” he says, “when does the spiritual experience happen with this shit?”

“For you, it’s probably not gonna happen, because you smoked so much weed today, even though I told you not to. Plus, don’t call the medicine ‘shit.’”

Mauro nods. Clean-shaven for a change, he looks younger and more Arabic than usual. I glimpse the boy he was before his prison term.

We’re all lying side by side on our backs on the carpet. Noni’s between Mauro and me. I observe her profile. “Your face must be worth quite a bit,” I estimate, “because it’s so pretty. I’m thinking like a hundred thousand sucres.”

“Yes, but *what kind of pretty?*” she wants to know.

“Pretty like a bat,” I say. It’s true. She laughs like a beautiful bat. Mauro and Rumi murmur together, then spring up and lope into the kitchen. Firelight flickering on his high, wise forehead, Ché moves a burning log closer to the center of the fire, which replies in sparks and hisses, while smoke leaps up the chimney.

Noni says to me, “So you were in the forest with the shamans. Is there such thing as telepathy? Is it real?”

I exchange glances with the pre-Columbian statue, but his spiral eyes tell me nothing. I have to think carefully about this. Pata dreamed that his brother was coming down the river to pick me up. I wonder again if that information could have been passed by physical means, like ripples from a stone dropped in a pond, or even like television. Eva’s brother Ambrosio announced his arrival with jaguars. Joaquín saw my vision of the devil. Dave and I both saw eyes in the sky. How did all that happen? I struggle to respond to Noni. I want to tell her the truth, but the words *yes* and *no* both miss the point. The answer seems farther from each of them than they are from each other; it’s not *maybe*, either.

There’s a commotion in the kitchen.

Smiling, we turn our shining eyes to see.

It takes us a few seconds to realize Rumi isn’t joking when he tells us he’s having severe heart palpitations because he and Mauro did lines of coke.

“Oh, my God!” María screams. “Do you need to go to a hospital?”

“I don’t know!” Rumi chokes out.

“He has a weak heart,” Ché says. “The doctor said he’s not supposed to have cocaine!”

“I need sugar!” Rumi gasps. María finds some. Mauro swiftly mixes him a tall glass of sugar water, and he gulps it down. I catch a glimpse of some sugar that, in the confusion, has spilled on Mauro’s shoulder.

Sitting on a kitchen chair, Rumi begs me, "Please, rub my feet!"

I do, and muster whatever psychic energy I can to draw the cocaine energy out of him and fling it away. This seems to work only to a certain extent; it feels like part of him is clinging tightly to the drug. The soles of his long feet are soft and dry. My magnetic hands are pulling out small amounts of the energy and flicking it away without being able to get a grip on the main quantity of it. My hand hurts. For a second, I think it's from the cocaine. Then I see I've banged it into a door.

María drops to her knees, presses her hands together, begs Jesus to spare Rumi's life. Mauro rushes around grabbing cushions to support Rumi on the sofa. Rumi babbles about whether or not to move to the sofa at all. Noni remains calm, observing everything, ready to help if needed. Ché hangs back, silent, coldly angry at his brother for spoiling the evening.

An hour after the crisis began, it seems pretty clear Rumi isn't about to die. Two hours after, he feels a little better.

María hands out blankets and pillows. We lie on the carpet and prepare to sleep.

The room is dark and still. There's just a glow in the fireplace. I'm on my back. There's just the momentary hiss of an ember. Noni's on her left side, facing me. There's just a slight contact.

Her right knee is touching my right hip.

I'm not sure if she's already asleep.

Or doing this on purpose.

Is she thinking about me, as I'm thinking about her?

*The hypothetical thoughts echo between us
like light between opposing mirrors.*

And

...

pleasure

...

ripples

...

through

...

my body.

...

¡Whoa!

¡!

¡Oh my God!

¡!

¡I'm gonna come!

¡!

The sensation isn't focused on my groin,
but *everywhere*.

iii

¡It's so strong

*I fear
I'll shout!
!!!*

*Before it can overwhelm me,
I edge
my hip
away
from Noni's
knee.*

*The energy
...
dissipates.
.*

*I know
if she's awake,
she'll think I'm rejecting her.
I think about her thinking about me
thinking about her thinking about me.
The hypothetical thoughts echo between us
like light between opposing mirrors.
But I can't say anything.
I'll probably never be able to explain.
Unless I put this in my book,
and one day, she reads it.*

*She doesn't move. Her breathing doesn't change.
She must be asleep after all.
Then it's my turn to drift off.*

* * *

We awoke at dawn, dazed, all six of us alive. We drank coffee and made our way back to Quito.

* * * * *



Colin James**For Those Who Don't Have the Patience for Horror**

Washed my socks in the sink.
Walked around barefoot while
they dried on a radiator.
I only have one pair now.

In the summer it doesn't matter—
get by barefoot or wear
sturdy leather moccasins.
Long walks are of course unusual.

My friend Nancy drops by on Tuesdays—
is very interested in vibrations at last.
She wanders around absorbed.

Once I forgot she was here at all—
then she popped up hours later,
cursing like a sailor. *Love her.*

* * *

Appeasing the Unmeaningful

A couple of those headaches please,
and one or two large red rashes
that start in the nether regions
then spread up clueless appendages.

Have you got any distraught delusions?
I could use several, or any.
Going on a big date tonight—
introductions to my potential in-laws.
Don't know how it quite came to this—
I thought we were just friendly.

Should I be paying more attention to details?
Reminds me of the packaging
in some of your swollen ankle deals.
Advertisements for vacation getaways
with perks, deep obese massage
which I can waddle with.

The trip from reinforced aqua plane
to 8* hotel is the trickiest yet.
Slip that arthritic knee pain in my bag.
I'll take one of these holistic fliers.

Don't worry—I'm only kidding.
I remain loyal to your back room stash.
So grateful to them apothecary wiles.

* * *

A Careless Exaggeration of Circumstances

God often walks through the woods, laughing.
The irreverent will gather his garlands.
The rest of us don't feel a need to disappoint,
since a lake has recently become a pond and
there is not much left to be lost in overt symbolism.

Dirt bikes, four wheelers, ATVs—
a constant reminder of mortality—
cascade as do precious waterfalls.

Lunch has been preserved in polythene,
leaving a series of long dish-shaped intercedents—
like status, merely antagonizingly asleep.

* * *

The Ninety-Ninth Worst Way to Commit Suicide

I fell through the orange
green sulfur clouds
for about a thousand feet before
hitting the white hot lava.
This is the ninety-ninth
worst way to commit suicide.

One hundredth is being torn apart
by a pack of wild dogs.
The unappreciated dingo comes to mind,
since I took several courses
at the local community college.

My ethics professor was forever
complaining about her love life.
Couldn't find a man no ways.

After a few weeks of this
I offered to make love to her myself,
if she would give me a passing grade.
To my surprise she agreed.

This is the ninety-seventh
worst way to commit suicide,
ninety-eighth is still in a formative state.

* * * * *



Notes on God

There has always been such vitriol between those who believe in some sort of God or gods, and those who feel this is ridiculous folly. Think of it this way: *Do you feel humans are the only beings in the cosmos? Do you feel that, perhaps, there are other beings, perhaps many more?*

Presumably, if there are, many of them would be quite a bit more powerful than humans. Presumably, some of them would reside in higher dimensions of reality (which science has proven to exist), and therefore be *considerably* more powerful than humans.

Would these beings really be distinguishable from gods? Why or why not? Why not call them that? You could think of them as super-powerful aliens if you want.

And, assuming all of this is logical, would it not follow that there is, somewhere, a *most* powerful being? The most powerful being in the cosmos? If so, would it be so illogical to call it God? Maybe?

* * *

So perhaps there are a slew of gods, and a most powerful one of those gods we could call, for convenience's sake, "God" (maybe both polytheism *and* monotheism are onto something). Presumably it would be extremely easy for these beings to take a person's quantum state (or wave function (also called the "soul")), which is known to govern an individual's consciousness, and preserve it in some sort of high-tech memory. *Why not?*

Perhaps these beings, or one of them, created a kind of computer simulation, and let it run indefinitely. Perhaps the Big Bang and the evolution of our universe are one small part of this simulation. So then, the laws of physics process the information that governs it.

We could say, then, that God is not responsible for what goes on, but rather that Nature is an independent process based upon necessity and contingency, or order and chaos. Thus the appearance and evolution of life are a development made possible by the rules of the simulation (which also needn't have been chosen). So we should stop blaming a God or gods for our messes, and start taking responsibility for them ourselves.

* * *

It is a grave mistake for us to assault the animal (and plant) kingdom. I would guess it displeases God a lot. Of course, our aboriginal forbears, which includes all hunter-gatherers and native peoples, did *not* assault the living kingdom, and it worked well for millions of years. By our assaulting it, we have come to the brink of extinction in 10,000 years. Clearly, we're breaking some rules.

These native peoples also understood the language of Nature in ways we can't even guess at. Humans lived sustainably and harmoniously on this planet for a very long time without causing any imbalances. Certainly we can talk to Nature in principle, but can we

figure out how? Will She listen?

Everything we are doing is a part of Nature's record and awareness, what I call the *noosphere*. Where the noosphere is pushing us is an open question, but it is obvious that all this is going to come to a head in the next few decades. What Nature has planned we shall have to wait and see, and I'm sure it will surprise everyone.

* * *

Someone might ask, "Well these are certainly unusual views—how did you come to embrace them?" That is a long and complicated story, but I shall try to give a brief summary. For much of my life I was an agnostic. But, in my twenties, I had what one would call, for lack of a better term, "visionary" experiences, in which it became apparent to me that there is infinitely more going on than our mundane lives would seem to indicate. It became apparent to me that, as many Native Americans believe, we are all already dead, and the dead are alive. For Indians, there was no boundary between these two realms.

I witnessed some non-ordinary phenomena that confirmed this belief. I'm not sure there's any way to explain these experiences, so I won't try. Suffice it to say that some people, myself included, have witnessed a depth and breadth to reality that runs completely counter to almost everything we have been told, and what we experience on a normal basis. Religions are seen to embrace certain aspects of the truth *esoterically*, but I am certainly no more of a fan now of *exoteric* religion than I ever was. The truth is far more subtle.

* * *

I wish there were some straightforward way of describing these experiences but, just as with the psychedelic experience, it cannot be put into words. The only evidence validating some of the things I have come to embrace—a sampling of it being represented here—is that there are others who have shared similar insights, all through the ages—especially poets, typically those of a mystical bent. The tradition of mysticism going back thousands of years seems to validate these views and, for mystics too, putting this milieu into language is an impossibility. We can only *refer* to it, but not *explain* or *prove* anything.

And so we all hope that as many people can have some sort of non-ordinary experience as possible. Nothing can be more valuable in stimulating one's curiosity, and shifting one's perspective in such a way as to find some sort of liberation from whatever form their difficulties, or their prison, have taken.

And nothing can be as valuable philosophically—to revere and to continue to search for the truth, which is, in the end, by far the most important thing for us.

* * *

The ultimate question is, "Why are we here?" I would say there's no one answer. We all have our reasons. I would say that there may be no clear purpose to our lives since, as I mentioned, it could be all God's computer simulation. But, on the other hand, we can create as much meaning in our lives as we wish. Just because there is no discernible purpose doesn't mean that each and every one of us can't do well—and do good—in the universe.

* * * * *

Tom Sheehan

The Semaphore in Sunlight Flew

All the darkness came at once, hooded
over us like a bird shadowing its wings
above shallow water snails, river's
white meat in the lesser turbulence.

Brine trudged sure as a peddler
in the thick handfuls of August air,
a resolute plodding from point to point,
looking for a place to put down its head,
to call it quits for one more night.

On nights like this, me safe abed,
thought to be hidden from temptation,
my father slipped from the house to fish
off the moving sands of Plum Island,

seeking the dream fish, the gargantuan
striper in from the Banks, the Bass
Behemoth. I'd seen him go a hundred times
and never called his name, never dreamed
of entering his dream, content to hear

the clanking going out of the tackle box
and the music coming back, lead weights
shifting noisily, the handle cranky
in his hand, dark waders rubbing knees.

While he was off over the hill, red tail-
light faded like a cast cigarette, house
silent again down through the granite base,
sisters dreaming of that other torture,
brother building bridges, spans, in his head,

mother a soul at her honest sleep, I laid
his line out across the salty steeps,
drove his hook into the maelstrom of eyes
and mouths agape in the netherworld,

pulled the tackle taut and lively to hand,
dreamed my father was me being my father,
shivered in boots for him, gasped.
Once I fell asleep while he was gone,
then for hours listened for the tackle box

to give off its signals, its telling tales
clanking him home safely from the sea,
and feared him into nasty depths, shark bait,
waders at once too heavy for the going.

I slipped down to their room. The sun
froze on their lovemaking, at once
icicled and starred the memorable arc,
which, in morning's madness, flew for me,
flew like semaphores in the sunlight.

* * * * *





Session Games People Play:

A Manual for the Use of LSD

[Essay]

This document was first published as a pamphlet in 1967, shortly after LSD was made “illegal” in the USA, by the Psychedelic Information Center, 26 Boylston Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is a guide for first-time experimenters with LSD. It reflects the healthy attitudes that still existed at the time of publication, lingering from the open innocence of the pre-prohibition era. The author, Lisa Bieberman, was eulogized by Timothy Leary in his essay “The Mad Virgin of Psychedelia,” which is included as chapter 19 of his 1968 collection, The Politics of Ecstasy.

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 109 | October 2019)

Evasion Games

The games that follow overlap to some extent, and have at their common root an attempt to evade responsibility in the session. Probably we all play various games to avoid responsibility in our daily lives, some of which LSD tends to cut through and expose to us. Some people, in an effort to avoid the discomfort of being exposed to themselves, plunge into a number of distracting games which seem to be attempts to prove that they are really drugged, irresponsible, and don't know what they are doing. Or they may try to become completely dependent on someone else, like a child.

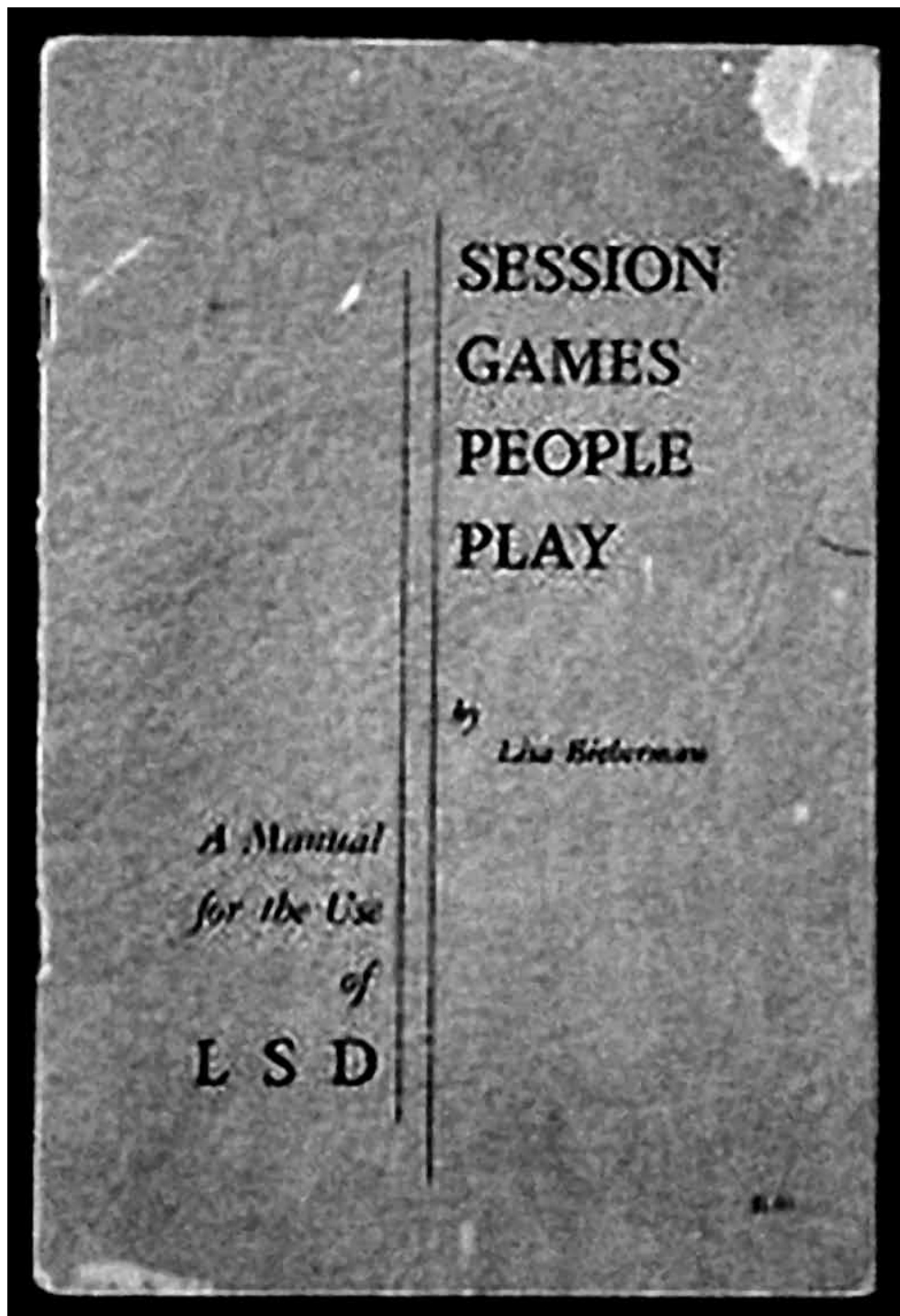
Alcohol parties are the prototype for this kind of game in our culture. Because alcohol, in large doses, really does cloud consciousness and impair functionality, there is some truth in the claim that a drunken person is not fully responsible. This gives the game players tremendous latitude to make fools of themselves, excusing it later on the grounds that they were drunk.

On LSD there is no such excuse. Consciousness is heightened, not clouded, and there is no particular impairment of muscular coordination beyond, perhaps, some initial dizziness. If you get into any of the following games you'll know it's your own fault, whatever you may let others think.

* * *

Baby

A young man I know who has just passed his first birthday has a standard procedure whenever he sees something interesting or pretty. He grabs it and gleefully pulls it to pieces. Some people in sessions are almost like this. They go about digging their fingers into things, crushing things, and dropping them any old where. They throw soap-suds or Kleenex around the floor. Now ordinary objects can be very fascinating when you're high, holding some of the



newness and wonder that they must hold for a small child. But do be gentle. Don't destroy what you appreciate. Otherwise you will have a gruesome re-entry, as you come down to a room that is a complete mess. And you'll have to clean it up—or you'll never find your shoes.

Another variant of *Baby* is where a session participant acts helpless and expects others to look after him. He communicates only in monosyllables or meaningless noises, wants others to pay attention to him, and fetch him food and water.

I suppose Freudians would call this *regression to the oral stage*, but I call it playing *Baby*, as a reminder that it doesn't just happen to a person, but is within his control. If you play *Baby*, you will miss the joy of sharing the experience with your friends. Besides, you will feel like a fool later, and nobody is likely to want to turn on with you again.

* * *

Couch

is a game where you decide the session was made for your personal psychoanalysis and start telling whoever will listen all about your childhood traumas and current neuroses.

Now a degree of self-exposure in a session is good. As you see through some of your phobias and hang-ups, you feel elated and want to tell somebody, and you often find that your friends have been hung up on the same petty thing that you have, and you laugh over it together and enjoy the feeling of relief.

Playing *Couch* is another matter. Pouring forth your entire stream of consciousness out loud is not honesty—it's an attempt to monopolize attention, and it also tends to keep your mind in a rut, shutting out new ways of looking at your problems.

People who play *Couch* are terrible bores. Of course it's different if you are turning on with a psychoanalyst, and that's what he wants you to do. I can't imagine wanting to turn on with a headshrinker, but there's no accounting for tastes.

* * *

Drunk

The person who plays *Drunk* tries to avoid any existential encounter in the session by reducing it all to silliness. He knows that anything he may be experiencing is *only the drug* so he's not about to let it move him. He giggles and snickers incessantly, moves with exaggerated clumsiness, and generally acts the buffoon.

Like *Baby* and *Couch*, this is a case of carrying to extremes something that is a normal element of the session. There is an aspect of absurdity and humorousness to ordinarily serious things that is one of the delights of the LSD experience. It would be a strange session in which nobody laughed.

The trouble with the guy who plays *Drunk* is that he won't leave room for anything else. Nothing can be sacred to him. He can't say anything sincere without immediately qualifying it with a nonsensical or cynical remark. Often he shows that he thinks of his *indulgence* in LSD as a dissipated or naughty thing to do. In other words, he does everything he can to shield his little ego from the impact of LSD by pretending that he is just on a drunk. He cheats himself and brings his companions down.

* * *

Let's Have an Orgy

is like *Drunk*, only worse. In one of my first morning glory sessions, there was a boy who kept stamping the floor nervously and insisting, "Let's put on some records and have a fuck'n party"—somewhat to the confusion of others who, just feeling their way into this new state of consciousness, were not at all in the mood for a party, but wondered whether they were being party-poopers for not going along with these demands.

Some people, faced with the strange and disquieting initial effects of LSD, respond by flinging themselves into a frantic pursuit of sensual pleasure. It is a kind of way of playing *Get Me Out of This* without the screaming. And, like *Baby* and *Drunk*, it draws on the cultural association of drugs with irresponsibility and wild behavior. To help convince himself, the player usually tries to draw his companions into the game. The forced nature of this behavior is obvious when you realize that LSD actually decreases, at its peak virtually eliminates, physical cravings. Loud music, food, sex games, jumping around, can do little to comfort the person whose real problem is that he wants to drown out his thoughts.

If one of your session-mates is playing this game, do not feel that you have to play it with him in order to be a good sport. Sit quietly and encourage him to do the same. The real pleasures of the session, including the sensory, come without seeking them, without straining, without doing anything.

* * *

Where's Harry?

is a game most often played around the fifth hour of a session, though it can crop up any time.

You think you'd like to wander off from the group and go do such-and-such (eat supper, see what Harvard Square looks like when you're high, visit Joe, etc.). If you slip out on a pretext of going to the john, nobody will notice for a while. You feel confident that you'll be OK. *After all, it's your session, don't you owe it to yourself to see all the things you can while you have a chance?*

You do not. In the first place, it's very inconsiderate. Your companions will notice your absence very soon. Time passes slowly for them—even a ten-minute absence can seem like an hour. You are in a state where you are easily distracted. Once you wander off, there's no telling when you'll get back. And all the while your companions can think of little else than *Where's Harry? Is he all right? Shouldn't we send somebody to look for him and make sure?*

You may feel that *of course you're all right and it's silly for them to worry*. Nevertheless they will, and this is quite natural. There is still a certain amount of distance between you and the un-be-drugged world. Your friends aren't sure but that you could get into some kind of trouble. It seems as though you've been gone for an awfully long time.

In the second place, you are confusing categories if you think that seeing as much as possible during a session means wandering around and seeing as many physical places and things as possible. The trip is internal. Moving around and seeking a large variety of external stimuli is only a distraction.

A third reason is that people who are going through a session together form a small community. Staying together helps keep everybody turned on, by mutual reinforcement. You would find that people outside are not so easy to communicate with, not having been through

this very intense experience with you and your friends. Your friends need you to help maintain the group feeling, and you need them. So stay together. This doesn't mean you should shut yourself off from your non-psychedelic friends—but there will be time enough to see them when you're not high.

If another member of the group pulls a *Where's Harry?* on you, do not send a person who's high after him, as this will just change the game into one of *Where's Harry and Bill?* If there is someone there who hasn't had any LSD, you can send him to find Harry and try to persuade him to come back, or at least make sure he's OK.

* * *

Mind Reader

The feeling that you know just what is going on in somebody else's mind, or that they are thinking the same thing you are thinking, often occurs in sessions. Sometimes you're right and sometimes not. The question whether actual telepathy takes place during sessions (or at any other time) is a controversial one. But one thing is certain: at least sometimes when you think you know what your companion is thinking, you are definitely mistaken.

Verbal attempts to establish whether your effort at mind reading has been successful are most unsatisfactory when conducted during a session. This is because verbal exchanges under LSD consist of about one-tenth words and nine-tenths innuendo. Unfortunately, the innuendo that the speaker intends to communicate, or things he has communicated, is often very different from what the listener thinks he meant. The result ranges from hilarious confusion to paranoid suspiciousness and annoyance.

Facial expressions are not an adequate indicator of thoughts either, because you can see them distorted, and can project your own feelings onto them.

An unfortunate byproduct of the game of *Mind Reader* is that the player may feel let down and betrayed when his companion fails to act on the understanding which the *Mind Reader* erroneously thinks has been reached. Or the *Mind Reader* may become paranoid when he thinks he perceives hostile thoughts in his companions. Also, he may confuse his companions if he adopts an *I know what you're thinking* or *You know what I mean* attitude. The companion wonders desperately how to respond in this situation where he is in the impossible position of not knowing what his friend thinks he knows his friend thinks.

The rules to follow in order to avoid these hang-ups are:

- ✓ Don't assume that you know what your companions are thinking, even if it feels that way;
- ✓ Don't assume that they know what you are thinking;
- ✓ Avoid extended conversation during the peak of the session. Do not try too hard to make sure that you understand what one another are saying; if this effort becomes too involved, give it up, and have a period of silence;
- ✓ When you do speak, speak literally rather than figuratively, in brief concrete sentences; and
- ✓ If asked a question, give a literal, straightforward answer.



If you wish to experiment with ESP during a session, this should be agreed upon by the members beforehand. Like other scientific tests, this is best postponed until you have had several experiences with LSD.

* * *

I Have All the Answers

Novices in LSD sessions sometimes become convinced that they know the answers to all the mysteries of life and the universe. The very people who are most dogmatic about this are often the most confused and perplexed around hour seven when they are returning to ordinary consciousness.

Go lightly. There are valid insights to be had in the psychedelic state, but their value lies in their applicability to daily life. Remember that you are in a transient state, and think of how you can put your insights to work to help you lead a better, richer life in your ordinary consciousness. Do not force your ideas on your consciousness. There is nothing wrong with expressing your thoughts, but you should respect the fact that your companions have thoughts of their own.

If you ever feel that you have all the answers you may be sure that you don't—no matter how many sessions you have had.

* * *

Messiah

The *Messiah* player not only has all the answers, he's going to tell the world about them. He runs out into the street or grabs the phone and tries to call the President. Anyone who interferes with him is preventing the salvation of the world and is put in his place.

One can't help sympathizing a bit with this guy. The world does need saving. If only it were so easy. Alas, the insights of LSD, vivid though they may be to you, are not readily communicated. Being essentially nonverbal, they are not even easily remembered. You will be batting above average if you can save yourself.

The urgent message you have to convey to those outside, if it is really communicable and worth communicating, can be conveyed tomorrow, more effectively because you will be in a state of mind nearer to that of your audience. *Write it down.*

* * *

Us Against Them

There is something about LSD revelations that makes them seem so obvious you can't figure out why you never saw them before. This tempts some people to jump to the conclusion: *It's Them. They* (the squares, the Establishment or what have you) *don't want people to know this. They're keeping it secret.*

Now this doesn't make much sense, because *They* would have to take LSD *Themselves* to have this particular secret to keep—and *They* don't. But the legal restrictions on psychedelics

add impetus for many to leap to this implausible hypothesis, and to build on it a view of society divided into the *Good Guys* and the *Bad Guys*.

There are two separate questions here: *Why are the psychedelics banned?* and *Why do you not ordinarily have the degree of illumination that you have when you're high?* I doubt these questions have any connection with one another, because the people who ban LSD don't know much about the nature of the experience.

Politicians who make laws are usually motivated by a complex mixture of the desire to promote the public welfare and the desire to promote their own careers, conditioned always by what they know and what they don't know. Some undoubtedly sincerely believe that LSD is dangerous, and that passing a law can reduce the harm. Others may not give a hoot about LSD, but see a chance to make political capital out of the issue. What is extremely unlikely is that a group of evil men in a smoke-filled room conspired to keep some cosmic secret from the public knowledge.

The reason why you do not have a certain kind of consciousness without the aid of LSD is probably just that your nervous system doesn't work that way. Should it work that way? Is the psychedelic state the natural state, which you have been deprived of by your particular kind of upbringing?

I don't think so. There is no evidence that any culture, anywhere, ever produced a race of permanently turned-on individuals. The psychedelic state, which is suited for contemplation and for overviewing the universe, is probably not well suited to the kind of daily work that produces the necessities of life. Remember that the psychotics and Holy Men who are (somewhat romantically) supposed to have attained a permanent high generally have to be supported by others.

Does this mean that you can take nothing of the experience back with you? Obviously this is not so, since psychedelic experiences seem to make such a profound impression on those who have them. Any insight which you can formulate verbally can be brought back, and will continue to be useful even though it no longer has the emotional immediacy of the session. Some of the ecstatic glow can be remembered, but only dimly; and you will realize when you have a second session how much you had forgotten. The effort to bring back and apply to your life what you have learned from LSD is a continual challenge.

It is to be hoped that you will not go back with an arrogant view of humanity that divides the world into *We Who Have Been There* and *They Who Have Not*. A sense of community with your fellow LSD users is natural and good, but if you sever your relations with non-users, and look down on them as squares, you will become irrelevant, and your message will not be heard.

* * *

Let's Call It a Day

is the commonest of session mistakes, and perhaps the one least deserving of being called a game, since it so often results from ignorance, rather than from any dishonesty or evasion. It is simply the attempt to terminate the session too early.

An LSD session lasts at least 12 hours, more often 16. There comes a time between the fourth and sixth hours when the intensity of the experience drops sharply and the remaining

hours are a kind of leveling out. This time has sometimes been called the *re-entry period*. The *re-entry period* retains the accelerated thoughts of the earlier parts of the session, with somewhat more visual distortion and somatic sensations, and less of the euphoria and flexibility of mood. It feels a lot more like the normal state than the earlier hours, but it is not the normal state. Most people who have not been told otherwise assume that the session is over when they reach this point around the fifth hour and try to go back to everyday activities, go out, eat dinner, or try to sleep.

This is a mistake, because rushing back to everyday activities tends to dissipate the insights of the session, and it also tends to be depressing or a *bringdown*. Sleep is impossible, and premature attempts usually make you uncomfortable. Eating too early in the session can make you feel sick.

Actually some of the most valuable work of the session can be done during re-entry. This is the time when you can think over the insights of the session, from a vantage point somewhat closer to your usual state. In fact, whether your experience is merely an isolated event or is relevant to your life as a whole may depend largely on how you use your re-entry time.

Stay in one place, together with your session mates. You can talk more now than you did before, but periods of silence are still helpful. Sit quietly and meditate; don't become distracted. This takes patience, because re-entry hours pass very slowly. By the eleventh hour it is OK to eat a light meal or to go off by yourself if you want to. After sixteen hours you should go to bed and get some sleep. If you have difficulty sleeping at this time, a light dose of Librium or Phenobarbital will help. You will be somewhat high until you go to sleep.

* * *

A Few Tips

- ✓ A session is tiring enough without staying up all night. Get a good night's sleep and start in the morning.
- ✓ Shun mirrors. On LSD you probably look awful to yourself in the mirror, probably because your pupils are dilated, and you see all your pores. You don't really look that bad.
- ✓ Don't stare at a companion, just because his face is changing into a multitude of different forms. He doesn't know why you're staring.
- ✓ Respect the undrugged state—you have to live in it. Write your memoranda in a form that will make sense to you tomorrow.

To avoid bad session games:

- ✓ Stay in one place
- ✓ Don't talk too much
- ✓ Be considerate of your companions

* * *

So You've Had LSD

So you've had LSD. It was your own unique experience. You may be wondering whether various aspects of your session were typical or not. Undoubtedly some were and some weren't. Since you are a unique person, your experience was not quite like anybody else's. If, in the coming weeks, you find, talking it over with your friends, that something happened to you that nobody else is expressing, that, at any rate, is very typical.

For the next several days, you will experience a mood that is a little different than your usual one. If the session went well, you'll probably feel better than usual. But if the session was disappointing you may be depressed. If so you should be aware that this is an after-effect that will go away within about two days. The experience of an altered mood after a session lasts about as long as the physiological tolerance to LSD, and may quite possibly have a physical, as well as a psychological, basis.

You may be wondering whether you should take LSD again and, if so, how soon? I advise waiting at least three months. Why so long? Well, hopefully this session has given you a lot to think about. You should have time to work on integrating what you have learned into your everyday life. After you have lived with it for several months you can come back to LSD from a new point on your life path and find new messages and new meaning.

But if you take LSD too frequently it can become a disruptive force; instead of gaining strength and understanding, you may only become more confused. Also, the experience may lose its profundity, may become commonplace and ineffectual. In general, I find that the longer I wait for a session the more meaningful and helpful it is.

If this talk of meaning leaves you cold because your experience wasn't very meaningful, it may be that you got gypped on the dose, or it may be that your state of mind kept you from letting go. I'd still recommend waiting a few months before trying again.

I think most people, just after a session, realize intuitively that they should not turn on again soon—but sometimes they forget how they felt and do it anyway. Therefore you should make a decision now about how long you are going to wait and stick to it.

If you do take LSD again, your next session will be different from the first—in fact each following session will also be different. There is something very special about a first session that is never quite repeated. Do not try to repeat or relive past sessions, but be open to what each new experience has to add to what you have learned.

Now that you have had this experience, what do you do about it? People have been asking this question ever since psychedelics were discovered, and it has never really been answered. *Do you go turn on everyone that you can (hoping that maybe they'll figure out what to do about it)? Do you emulate the hip crowd, adopting their psychedelic fashions and jargon? Should you become a monk? Take up Buddhism or astrology? To whom should you turn for advice?*

A complicating factor is that at the present time of writing (early 1967) the word *psychedelic* seems to be an adjective that sells soap. A great deal that has little relevance to the LSD experience goes under the name *psychedelic*. Don't be hasty to plunge into what somebody else calls *psychedelic* if it doesn't make sense in terms of your experience. Suspend judgment on it and see what sort of people are involved in it and where it is leading them. The same goes for cults that other LSD users may belong to. Cults and fads are transient. Try to distinguish them from that which is of lasting truth in your experience.

Because the use of LSD is a controversial social issue you will have to decide what part you will play in the social and legal conflicts over this issue. It may be my own bias, but I feel that everyone who owes something of value to LSD should take some part. There is something eroding to one's integrity about keeping silent and doing secretly what others are going to jail for. Of course you do not want to go to jail yourself and thus curtail the good you can do. It is necessary to learn the law in your area (from the statutes, not from rumor) and to learn for what people are prosecuted and for what they are not. One is not, for instance, prosecuted for writing or speaking out about his experience or the LSD issue in general. Some may choose to be prosecuted in order to make a test case, but this course of action is not for everyone, and if you are considering something of the sort you should plan it very carefully with the help of a lawyer.

The ways in which people incarnate their vision are as individual as their lives, and this book can go no further in telling you how to do it. You will find some of the answer in your sessions and in your life experiences between sessions. It may be as simple as living, or as difficult.

* * * * *







Sunstone

a crystal willow, a poplar of water,
 a tall fountain the wind arches over,
 a tree deep-rooted yet dancing still,
 a course of a river that turns, moves on,
 doubles back, and comes full circle,
 forever arriving:

 the calm course
 of the stars or an unhurried spring,
 water with eyes closed welling over
 with oracles all night long,
 a single presence in a surge of waves,
 wave after wave till it covers all,
 a reign of green that knows no decline,
 like the flash of wings unfolding in the sky,

a path through the wilderness of days to come,
 and the gloomy splendor of misery like a bird
 whose song can turn a forest to stone,
 and the imminent joys on branches that vanish,
 the hours of light pecked away by the birds,
 and the omens that slip past the hand,

a sudden presence like a burst of song,
 like the wind singing in a burning building,
 a glance that holds the world and all
 its seas and mountains dangling in the air,
 body of light filtered through an agate,
 thighs of light, belly of light, the bays,
 the solar rock, cloud-colored body,
 color of a brisk and leaping day,
 the hour sparkles and has a body,
 the world is visible through your body,
 transparent through your transparency,

I travel my way through galleries of sound,
 I flow among echoing presences,
 I cross transparencies as though I were blind,
 a reflection erases me, I'm born in another,
 oh forest of pillars that are enchanted,
 through arches of light I travel into
 the corridors of a diaphanous fall,

I travel your body, like the world,
 your belly is a plaza full of sun,
 your breasts two churches where blood
 performs its own, parallel rites,
 my glances cover you like ivy,
 you are a city the sea assaults,
 a stretch of ramparts split by the light
 in two halves the color of peaches,
 a domain of salt, rocks and birds,
 under the rule of oblivious noon,

dressed in the color of my desires,
 you go your way naked as my thoughts,
 I travel your eyes, like the sea,
 tigers drink their dreams in those eyes,
 the hummingbird burns in those flames,
 I travel your forehead, like the moon,
 like the cloud that passes through your thoughts,
 I travel your belly, like your dreams,

your skirt of corn ripples and sings,
 your skirt of crystal, your skirt of water,
 your lips, your hair, your glances rain
 all through the night, and all day long
 you open my chest with your fingers of water,
 you close my eyes with your mouth of water,
 you rain on my bones, a tree of liquid
 sending roots of water into my chest,

I travel your length, like a river,
 I travel your body, like a forest,
 like a mountain path that ends at a cliff
 I travel along the edge of your thoughts,
 and my shadow falls from your white forehead,
 my shadow shatters, and I gather the pieces
 and go with no body, groping my way,

the endless corridors of memory, the doors
 that open into an empty room
 where all the summers have come to rot,
 jewels of thirst burn at its depths,
 the face that vanishes upon recall,
 the hand that crumbles at my touch,
 the hair spun by a mob of spiders
 over the smiles of years ago,

setting out from my forehead, I search,
 I search without finding, search through a moment,
 a face of storm and lightning-flashes
 racing through the trees of night,
 a face of rain in a darkened garden,
 relentless water that flows by my side,

I search without finding, I write alone,
 there's no one here, and the day falls,
 the year falls, I fall with the moment,
 I fall to the depths, invisible path
 over mirrors repeating my shattered image,
 I walk through the days, the trampled moments,
 I walk through all the thoughts of my shadow,
 I walk through my shadow in search of a moment,

I search for an instant alive as a bird,
 for the sun of five in the afternoon
 tempered by walls of porous stone:
 the hour ripened its cluster of grapes,
 and bursting, girls spilled out from the fruit,
 scattering in the cobblestone patios of the school,
 one was tall as autumn and walked

through the arcades enveloped in light,
and space encircled, dressed her in a skin
even more golden and more transparent,

tiger the color of light, brown deer
on the outskirts of night, girl glimpsed
leaning over green balconies of rain,
adolescent incalculable face,
I've forgotten your name, Melusina,
Laura, Isabel, Persephone, Mary,
your face is all the faces and none,
you are all the hours and none,
you're a tree and a cloud, all the birds
and a single star, the edge of the sword
and the executioner's bowl of blood,
the ivy that creeps, envelops, uproots
the soul, and severs it from itself,

writing of fire on a piece of jade,
crack in the stone, queen of snakes,
column of mist, spring in the rock,
lunar circus, aerie of eagles,
anise-seed, thorn tiny and mortal,
thorn that brings immortal pain,
shepherdess of valleys under the sea,
gatekeeper of the valley of the dead,
liana that drops from the cliffs of vertigo,
tangling vine, poisonous plant,
resurrection flower, grape of life,
lady of the flute and the lightning-flash,
terrace of jasmine, salt in the wound,
branch of roses for the man shot down,
snow in August, gallows' moon,
writing of the sea on basalt rock,
writing of the wind on desert sand,
the sun's last will, pomegranate, wheat,

face of flames, face devoured,
adolescent face plagued by phantom years

and circular days that open out
 on the same patio, the same wall,
 the moment is aflame, and all the faces
 that appear in the flames are a single face,
 all of the names are a single name,
 all of the faces a single face,
 all of the centuries a single moment,
 and through all the centuries of the centuries
 a pair of eyes blocks the way to the future,

there's nothing in front of me, only a moment
 salvaged from a dream tonight of coupled
 images dreamed, a moment chiseled
 from the dream, torn from the nothing
 of this night, lifted by hand, letter
 by letter, while time, outside, gallops
 away, and pounding at the doors of my soul
 is the world with its bloodthirsty schedules,

only a moment while the cities, names,
 flavors and everything that is alive
 all crumble inside my blind skull,
 while the sorrows of night press on my thoughts,
 weigh down my spine, and my blood runs
 a little slower, my teeth wobble,
 my eyes cloud over, and the days
 and years heap their empty horrors,

while time folds its fan shut
 and behind its images there's nothing,
 the moment plunges into itself
 and floats surrounded by death,
 threatened by night's lugubrious yawn,
 threatened by death that is masked and alive,
 the moment plunges into itself,
 into itself like a closing fist,
 like a fruit that ripens toward its center



and drinks from itself, spilling over,
 the moment, translucent, seals itself off
 and ripens inward, sends out roots,
 grows within me, taking me over,
 its feverish leafing drives me out,
 my thoughts are nothing more than its birds,
 its mercury runs through my veins, tree
 of the mind, fruit that tastes of time,

oh life to live, life already lived,
 time that comes back in a swell of sea,
 time that recedes without turning its head,
 the past is not past, it is still passing by,
 flowing silently into the next vanishing moment:

in an afternoon of stone and saltpeter,
 armed with invisible razors you write
 in red illegible script on my skin,
 and the wounds dress me like a suit of flames,
 I burn without end, I search for water,
 in your eyes there's no water, they're made of stone,
 and your breasts, your belly, your hips are stone,
 your mouth tastes of dust, your mouth tastes
 like poisoned time, your body tastes
 like a well that's been sealed, passage of mirrors
 where anxious eyes repeat, passage
 that always leads back to where it began,
 you take me, a blind man, led by the hand,
 through relentless galleries toward the center
 of the circle, and you rise like splendor
 hardened into an axe, like light that flays,
 engrossing as a gallows is to the doomed,
 flexible as whips and thin as a weapon
 that's twin to the moon, your sharpened words
 dig out my chest, depopulate me

and leave me empty, one by one
 you extract my memories, I've forgotten my name,
 my friends grunt in a wallow with the pigs
 or rot in ravines eaten by the sun,

there is nothing inside me but a large wound,
 a hollow place where no one goes,
 a windowless present, a thought that returns
 and repeats itself, reflects itself,
 and loses itself in its own transparency,
 a mind transfixed by an eye that watches
 it watching itself till it drowns itself
 in clarity:

I saw your horrid scales,
 Melusina, shining green in the dawn,
 you slept twisting between the sheets,
 you woke shrieking like a bird,
 and you fell and fell, till white and broken,
 nothing remained of you but your scream,
 and I find myself at the end of time
 with bad eyes and a cough, rummaging through
 the old photos:

there's no one, you're no one,
 a heap of ashes and worn-out broom,
 a rusted knife and a feather duster,
 a pelt that hangs from a pack of bones,
 a withered branch, a black hole,
 and there at the bottom the eyes of a girl
 drowned a thousand years ago,

glances buried deep in a well,
 glances that have watched us since the beginning,
 the girl's glance of the aged mother
 who sees her grown son a young father,
 the mother's glance of the lonely girl
 who sees her father a young son,
 glances that watch us from the depths
 of life, and are the traps of death
 —or what if that fall into those eyes
 were the way back to true life?

to fall, to go back, to dream myself,
 to be dreamed by other eyes that will come,
 another life, other clouds,
 to die yet another death!
 —this night is enough, this moment that never
 stops opening out, revealing to me
 where I was, who I was, what your name is,
 what my name is:

was it I making plans
 for the summer—and for all summers—
 on Christopher Street, ten years ago,
 with Phyllis, who had two dimples in her cheeks
 where sparrows came to drink the light?
 on the Reforma did Carmen say to me,
 “the air’s so crisp here, it’s always October,”
 or was she speaking to another I’ve forgotten,
 or did I invent it and no one said it?
 in Oaxaca was I walking through a night
 black-green and enormous as a tree,
 talking to myself like the crazy wind,
 and reaching my room—always a room—
 was it true the mirrors didn’t know me?
 did we watch the dawn from the Hotel Vernet
 dancing with the chestnut trees—
 did you say “it’s late,” combing your hair,
 did I watch the stains on the wall and say nothing?
 did the two of us climb the tower together,
 did we watch evening fall on the reef?
 did we eat grapes in Bidart? in Perote
 did we buy gardenias?

names, places,
 streets and streets, faces, plazas,
 streets, a park, stations, single
 rooms, stains on the wall, someone
 combing her hair, someone dressing,
 someone singing at my side, rooms,
 places, streets, names, rooms,

Madrid, 1937,
in the Plaza del Ángel the women were sewing
and singing along with their children,
then: the sirens' wail, and the screaming,
houses brought to their knees in the dust,
towers cracked, facades spat out
and the hurricane drone of the engines:
the two took off their clothes and made love
to protect our share of all that's eternal,
to defend our ration of paradise and time,
to touch our roots, to rescue ourselves,
to rescue the inheritance stolen from us
by the thieves of life centuries ago,
the two took off their clothes and kissed
because two bodies, naked and entwined,
leap over time, they are invulnerable,
nothing can touch them, they return to the source,
there is no you, no I, no tomorrow,
no yesterday, no names, the truth of two
in a single body, a single soul,
oh total being . . .

rooms adrift
in the foundering cities, rooms and streets,
names like wounds, the room with windows
looking out on other rooms
with the same discolored wallpaper,
where a man in shirtsleeves reads the news
or a woman irons; the sunlit room
whose only guest is the branches of a peach;
and the other room, where it's always raining
outside on the patio and the three boys
who have rusted green; rooms that are ships
that rock in a gulf of light; rooms
that are submarines: where silence dissolves
into green waves, and all that we touch
phosphoresces; and the tunes of luxury,
with their portraits nibbled, their rugs unraveling;

and the traps, the cells, the enchanted grottoes,
the birdcages and the numbered rooms,
all are transformed, all take flight,
every molding is a cloud, every door
leads to the sea, the country, the open
air, every table is set for a banquet;
impenetrable as conches, times lay siege
to them in vain, there is no more time,
there are no walls: space, space,
open your hand, gather these riches,
pluck the fruit, eat of life,
stretch out under the tree and drink!

all is transformed, all is sacred,
every room is the center of the world,
it's still the first night, and the first day,
the world is born when two people kiss,
a drop of light from transparent juices,
the room cracks half-open like a fruit
or explodes in silence like a star,
and the laws chewed away by the rats,
the iron bars of the banks and jails,
the paper bars, the barbed wire,
the rubber stamps, the pricks and goads,
the droning one-note sermon on war,
the mellifluous scorpion in a cap and gown,
the top-hatted tiger, chairman of the board
of the Red Cross and the Vegetarian Society,
the schoolmaster donkey, the crocodile cast
in the role of savior, father of the people,
the Boss, the shark, the architect of the future,
the uniformed pig, the favorite son
of the Church who washes his blackened dentures
in holy water and takes classes in civics
and conversational English, the invisible walls,
the rotten masks that divide one man
from another, one man from himself,
they crumble
for one enormous moment and we glimpse
the unity that we lost, the desolation
of being man, and all its glories,
sharing bread and sun and death,
the forgotten astonishment of being alive;



to love is to battle, if two kiss
 the world changes, desires take flesh,
 thoughts take flesh, wings sprout
 on the backs of the slave, the world is real
 and tangible, wine is wine, bread
 regains its savor, water is water,
 to love is to battle, to open doors,
 to cease to be a ghost with a number
 forever in chains, forever condemned
 by a faceless master;

the world changes

if two look at each other and see,
 to love is to undress our names:
 “let me be your whore” said Héloise,
 but he chose to submit to the law
 and made her his wife, and they rewarded him
 with castration;

better the crime,

the suicides of lovers, the incest committed
 by brother and sister like two mirrors
 in love with their likeness, better to eat
 the poisoned bread, adultery on a bed
 of ashes, ferocious love, the poisonous
 vines of delirium, the sodomite who wears
 a gob of spit for a rose in his lapel,
 better to be stoned in the plaza than to turn
 the mill that squeezes out the juice of life,
 the turns eternity into empty hours,
 minutes into prisons, and time into
 copper coins and abstract shit;

better chastity, the invisible flower
 that rocks atop the stalks of silence,
 the difficult diamond of the holy saints
 that filters desires, satiates time,
 the marriage of quietude and motion,
 solitude sings within its corolla,
 every hour is a petal of crystal,
 the world strips off its masks,
 and at its heart, a transparent shimmer

that we call God, nameless being
who studies himself in the void, faceless
being emerged from himself, sun
of suns, plentitude of presences and names;

I follow my raving, rooms, streets,
I grope my way through corridors of time,
I climb and descend its stairs, I touch
its walls and do not move, I go back
to where I began, I search for your face,
I walk through the streets of myself
under an ageless sun, and by my side
you walk like a tree, you walk like a river,
and talk to me like the course of a river,
you grow like wheat between my hands,
you throb like a squirrel between my hands,
you fly like a thousand birds, and your laugh
is like the spray of the sea, your head
is a star between my hands, the world
grows green again when you smile,
eating an orange,

the world changes
if two, dizzy and entwined, fall
on the grass: the sky comes down, trees
rise, space becomes nothing but light
and silence, open space for the eagle
of the eye, the white tribe of clouds
goes by, and the body weighs anchor,
the soul sets sail, and we lose
our names and float adrift in the blue
and green, total time where nothing
happens but its own, easy crossing,

nothing happens, you're quiet, you blink,
(silence: just now an angel crossed,
huge as the life of a hundred suns),
is nothing happening, only a blink?
—and the banquet, the exile, the first crime,
the jawbone of the ass, the opaque thud

and the startled glance of the dead falling
on an ash-strewn plain, Agamemnon's
great bellow, the screams of Cassandra,
over and over, louder than the sea,
Socrates in chains (the sun rises,
to die is to wake: "Crito, a cock
for Aesculapius, I am cured of life"),
the jackal discoursing in the ruins of Nineveh,
the shade that appeared to Brutus on the eve
of the battle, Moctezuma insomniac
on his bed of thorns, the ride in the carriage
toward death—the interminable ride,
counted minute by minute by Robespierre,
his broken jaw between his hands,
Churruca on his cask like a scarlet throne,
the numbered steps of Lincoln as he left
for the theater, Trotsky's death-rattle
and his howl like a boar, Madero's gaze
that no one returned: why are they killing me?,
and the curses, the sighs, the silence
of the criminal, the saint, the poor devil,
graveyards of anecdotes and phrases scratched up
by rhetorical dogs, and the shouts of victory,
the raving, the dark sound we make
when dying and that pulsebeat of life
as it's born, and the sound of bones being crushed
in the fray and the foaming mouth of the prophet
and his scream and the scream of the hangman
and the scream of the victim . . .

eyes are flames,
what they see is flames, the ear a flame
and sounds a flame, lips are coals,
the tongue is a poker, touch and the touched,
thoughts and the thought-of, he who thinks
is flame, all is burning, the universe

is flame, the nothing is burning, the nothing
that is only a thought in flames, and nothing
in the end but smoke: there is no victim,
there is no hangman . . .

and the cry on Friday
 afternoon?, and the silence covered in signs,
 the silence that speaks without ever thinking,
 does it say nothing? are cries nothing?
 does nothing happen as time passes by?

—nothing happens, only a blink
 of the sun, nothing, barely a motion,
 there is no redemption, time can never
 turn back, the dead are forever
 fixed in death and cannot die
 another death, they are untouchable,
 frozen in a gesture, and from their solitude,
 from their death, they watch us,
 helpless, without ever watching,
 their death is now a statue of their life,
 an eternal being eternally nothing,
 every minute is eternally nothing,
 a ghostly king rules over your heartbeat
 and your final expression, a hard mask
 is formed over your changing face:
 the monument that we are to a life,
 unlived and alien, barely ours,

—when was life ever truly ours?
 when are we ever what we are?
 we are ill-reputed, nothing more
 than vertigo and emptiness, a frown in the mirror,
 horror and vomit, life is never
 truly ours, it always belongs to the others,
 life is no one's, we all are life—
 bread of the sun for the others,
 the others that we all are—

when I am another, my acts
are more mine when they are the acts
of others, in order to be I must be another,
leave myself, search for myself
in the others, the others that don't exist
if I don't exist, the others that give me
total existence, I am not,
there is no I, we are always us,
life is other, always there,
further off, beyond you and
beyond me, always on the horizon,
life which unlives us and makes us strangers,
that invents our face and wears it away,
hunger for being, oh death, our bread,

Mary, Persephone, Héloïse, show me
your face that I may see at last
my true face, that of another,
my face forever the face of us all,
face of the tree and the baker of bread,
face of the driver and the cloud and the sailor,
face of the sun and face of the stream,
face of Peter and Paul, face
of this crowd of hermits, wake me up,
I've already been born:

life and death
make a pact within you, lady of night,
tower of clarity, queen of dawn,
lunar virgin, mother of mother sea,
body of the world, house of death,
I've been falling endlessly since my birth,
I fall in myself without touching bottom,
gather me in your eyes, collect
my scattered dust and reconcile my ashes,
bind these unjointed bones, blow over
my being, bury me deep in your earth,
and let your silence bring peace to thought
that rages against itself:

open

your hand, lady of seeds that are days,
 the day is immortal, it rises and grows,
 it has just been born, its birth never ends,
 each day is a birth, each dawn is a birth
 and I am dawning, we are all dawning,
 the sun dawns with the face of the sun,
 John dawns with John's face,
 the face of John that is everyone's face,

door of being, dawn and wake me,
 allow me to see the face of this day,
 allow me to see the face of this night,
 all communicates, all is transformed,
 arch of blood, bridge of the pulse,
 take me to the other side of this night,
 where I am you, we are us,
 the kingdom where pronouns are intertwined,

door of being: open your being
 and wake, learn to be, form
 your face, develop your features, have
 a face I can see to see my face,
 to see life until its death, a face
 of the sea, bread, rocks and a fountain,
 source where all our faces dissolve
 in the nameless face, the faceless being,
 the unspeakable presences of presences . . .

I want to go on, to go further, and cannot:
as each moment was dropping into another
I dreamt the dreams of dreamless stones,
and there at the end of the years like stones
I heard my blood, singing in its prison,
and the sea sang with a murmur of light,
one by one the walls gave way,
all of the doors were broken down,
and the sun came bursting through my forehead,
it tore apart my closed lids,
cut loose my being from its wrappers,
and pulled me out of myself to wake me
from this animal sleep and its centuries of stone,
and the sun's magic of mirrors revived
a crystal willow, a poplar of water,
a tall fountain the wind arches over,
a tree deep-rooted yet dancing still,
a course of a river that turns, moves on,
doubles back, and comes full circle,
forever arriving:

* * * * *





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

cxli.

A month passes, resume.

A month, really?

A month. *Resume—*

"Where did all the people go?

Why did they fade away from me?

They meant so much to me & now I know

That they're here to stay, in my heart"

—Neil Young & Crazy Horse,

"Olden Days," 2019.

Whatever this book is, it's the baddest ass thing it can be—

Pay mind—Listening first time to Neil Young & Crazy Horse's new LP, *Colorado*, the baddest ass thing they can be—

They are from a lost village

*"Won't someone help me lose
my mind?"*

—NY & CH

their music like a trinket

tea of remembering, an invitation,

a loud beautiful invitation—

the lost village on a book/movie/Island called *Labyrinthine*, called **RemoteLand**, called *TripTown*, called *called called! called? called! called?!?!?*

Pirth's soft purple paw on my nose, *pat pat pat pat pat pat*

Weeks passed & I shook mind's ass for a job, over & over & over,
shook & shook & shook
ass & ass & ass & ass

"We & the team loved to meet you but"—but *this*, but *that*

Then today a score & weirdly no joy—barely relief—

I need their money, more of it if possible, but I'm done ceding some of my soul to any employer—

That's what three months of this ass-shaking shit has taught me—

What does that mean? How is that hours spent at any job?

I will work well for my money but my heart belongs elsewhere, to those I esteem, to this work—

This badass book, badass Neil & his crew, Art, *fucking Art*—

If a job I poured my good daylight self into for 7 years can be took in a few hours for no good reason, it means any can be—it's happened to me multiple times & I try to forget & hope *this time, this one, true & lasting*—

"*Everything changes*" JBIII told me so long ago, & "*beware & be aware*"—I don't know what to do with any of this—

"You writing a book?"

"Yah"

"What's it about?"

"Life."

"Life? Your life?"

"Life in general, yah."

Pirth's purple furred paw patting my nose, *calm, look around, hmmm mmm mmm*

"I know you ask . . . all the same questions

I do . . . I do . . . I do . . . I do . . ."

—NY & CH

Mac-Donald's & Hall-o-ween & New Britain I keep coming here like some retreat to the expensive wilds I come to this poor city of my agos & live here a few days of the year—found out today I might end up working in ZombieTown, Mass. awhile or longer—*wowza*

Then something better came along. A place that wanted me, made sure to get me, everyone I met there, involved one way or another, made me feel welcomed, glad I was arrived—it seemed unreal, a trick, a *something*—but it was real & good & here I am gonna start in next week—

The doubts shed slowly, countless rejections—but—honestly—

fuck them—every last one—

Shit happens—hurt happens—loss happens—the marks, memories remain—but *shake the rest of the shit off—*

If the good in life gets shoved into the shadows of the bad, who's the fucking idiot doing that?

Do the fucking work *good*
Do the fucking work *better*

Count every good blessing
& fortune & suck it down
smiling

✂ shit out the bad

let it all go & see what remains

“You OK, brother?”
“I think so. I’m trying.”
“Sit with us now.”

Another voice:
“Drink our tea?”
“Your remembering tea?”
“Aye, brother.”
“Will it help me remember better? Because I don’t do so hot at it.”
“Sip.”

Tastes . . . like a furry purple paw patting my nose?

Oh. Pirth? He’s in my lap too.



"I don't understand."

"It's OK, brother."

"I remember too much. It clogs my lines, fucks my steps on."

"That. And?"

"Maybe sometimes it gives me perspective. Empathy. I don't know."

"It's OK, brother."

"I'm sorry."

"That's part of it too. Sip again."

Outside this tall glass window, down below on the trafficking street, the shadowy Common over there, sweet mysterious music in my ears. "*I focus on my breathing, in the universal sound . . .*"

Those ships are overhead,
I see them now.

They remain from long ago
& ever on. Like watching,
like guarding.

They did not choose to leave like
the rest, & they are
among us always.

"What do we do about them?"

"Do?"

"If they are here to help?"

"If you believe all that true, then you figure out what help would look like."

"OK."

I feel like this could be something really to go with, *but what help?*

cxlii.

In 16 minutes I need to stand up & walk me & me bag from one airport gate to another—here, this ragged seat, near a wall power outlet from which I can charge my beloved Polly iPod ☺ & listen to my beloved's radio show *White Walls w/DJ Blue*, #34, fiddles high & low, bluegrass ever on & beyond the horizon; so, in sum, at the wrong gate, needed to get Polly the juice, & did, & a quarter-full bottle Diet Coke in my other hand, this airport is the closest to the Empire's Capitol—

In 12 minutes I need to stand up & go, TV hung from ceiling soberly details the slow fall of the Klownéd King, power slips from every hand, more grandiosely when the bearer feels no allegiance to anyone else, when his only strengths are arrogance & self-delusion, the first

powerful enough to catch many others in the second's net—

8 minutes till I stand up & soon depart this business trip where new colleagues endorsed me, & I them, & we conspired new good collaborations to come, shared meals, talked much, listened better—each of us nervous to meet the others, each of us glad it happened—

6 minutes till I haul myself up with me goods, & up two hours airborne to return to New England, return to home, & never a face in this large airport known, hundreds set in the lounge around me, hundreds more pass by me on their ways, each a mystery, each a *strange strange* something in a *strange strange* world—

Aboard a vast airboat & up to the dusky skies & I think about my petty resentments & then think: *why?*

The old thought, wisdom maybe, about walking a mile in someone else's shoes to understand them, true enough, but how can it be breached?

Is it a function of being in another's body & mind to understand? This would be much, is there more? Could even this magick be abused or simply not enough? What if one did not wish to return? Could a glimpse of otherness *affect anything?*

Does this any of it to do with the ships overhead? Why they are there? Whatever-ever for?

I don't know. Roll dice, toss coins, *don't know*.

Now on a metro-Boston bus I used to talk every day for years, to & from a job I have no longer, to & from a place I no longer live—

Am I less him for this? Do pieces fleck off & others accumulate over time? What are any of continuously but bodies & memories?

Too crowded on this bus to throw dice & coins, so letting loose with what there is, whatever it may be, cold evening last day of November

—& what then? Nothing consequential necessarily—what about the ships overhead? What about the more moss than in awhile?

What does any of it mean but moments, a few, & somehow they shine, they linger, the rest breathe out & away—

I have no answers in this bus crowded with warm dressed faces, middle evening here, some say *just be*, I say *that's not enough*

I'm trying to work it, whatever *it* is, grope in & out for *knowing* that *feels true*—Xmas lights on darkened buildings
“Stop requested”

What do the shadows below & the ships overhead mean? How to explain anything to anything else? What to know?

What next? Maya. Surrounded by Creatures in the Great Cavern under the Tangled Gate. Kinley, Christina, Dylan near her, many Creatures about them as well. Creatures are friendly to any kindly lap.

I'm watching from afar until I'm nudged by MeZmer the White Bunny to fully arrive. Rewards me by hopping in my lap. My wonderful Tender, ever a weathered eye 'pon me.

They're looking at me, waiting. Hmm. I throwed the dice & coins finally, I'm iterated here from a familiar place back in Harvard Square, my dear Polly iPod played R.E.M.'s *Murmur* LP for me. MeZmer stirs & approves. That's Princess Crissy music too.

Shrooms in me too, plenty & friendly too, & they tender me too, when I listen. MeZmer sniffs. *When.*

OK. Then. I have a job, I really do, & I have a really good one for all that, & here I am, & my black pen is moving &, my beloved home safe in Bungalow Cee where also resides the Creature Common & doorways to elsewhere. *Lovely.*

There are people-folks kindly disposed to me too. Sometimes read of this book when it's typed up neatly for *The Cenacle* four times a year. I love them, more than mah bruised old heartbone can always say well. They know I believe in them, urge them on, *manifest, & more, & smiling more!*

But what then? What here & now? All wait. One song on Polly ends, another begins, turn the page—

Eyes closed, I speak. "I am in a white room but with my eyes closed like this is a kind of travel without moving much—

"As I become better I am able to travel far & navigate without hitting the walls; I'm able to scale up & over & onto the ceiling, which then becomes floor or wall; sometimes I stumble or crash, & lay back simply in a white room.

"Is this a hospital or a prison where I'm bound? Is this where my body really is, or is it a projection from somewhere else too?"

I stop, eyes still closed, wait.

Begin to *hmmm*, low & slow, & feel my friends in this Great Cavern join in with me, braiding us together, & it's like floating far out in deep space, & eons seem to pass, & fear tugs me but cannot hold—



They were with me, each a color & a sniff & a taste & a *hmmm* & a touch & a something else too, they are close to me, we are coming, we are coming, we are coming, we are arriving to Some-Place, some where, it is blurry & wispy & old & sad & hopeful, forms ever changing in shape & in number, & we are continuing along now, descending from this space-o-sphere to light & air & warmth & *look there! look down there!*

It's the Thought Fleas Great Clearing in the White Woods! Do they see us? *Do they see us as what we are or some other form?*

Are we one braided thing?
Are we dropping like many raindrops?
Are we dropping like one?

We are falling, & more for having been in those starcraft & welcomed & invited down there, whatever we are, however many, whichever form or forms we take, *we are welcomed—*

And we fall & fall & fall,
 down & down & down & down,
 until we land *ker-splash!*
 in the big kettle of Rutabega Soup
 for it *is* Rutabega Festival & Fleastock time again & we land in the beautiful Soup & some of what we are remains in this Soup, becomes part of this Soup, to be slurped & drunk by all the wonderful beings in this Great Clearing—

& yet some down & down & down ever more like somewhere hidden? Hidden from all? Possible?

Open my eyes. Look at Maya.

“The well,” we say in one voice.

cxliii.

“Hi, I’m Raymond, author guy of *Labyrinthine*, *Many Musics*, & helper to Algernon Beagle in publishing his *Bags End News* stories.

“You may wonder why I would take these lines & this time to introduce myself this far into this book. What haven’t I said about myself? How haven’t I complained about how the world done me wrong this way, & that way, & the countless others?

“But it seems none of you know me in here, or that you are in my book called *Labyrinthine*.”

“What’s it about?” someone asks.

“Well, on the back cover it says it’s the ‘story of 6 different kinds of imprisonment.’ Or something like that.”

"Is it?"

"Is what?"

"Is it about what you just said?"

"I guess. Not really. Yes. No. Um."

"Are you going to read it to us?"

"Or let us read it for ourselves?"

"*It's very long.*"

"None of us are hurrying away."

"I think there are several versions. And several authors. Most of them me, sort of."

"Sort of?"

"Hard to say."

"That's what Creatures say. Is that why your friend is here? They usually don't come in here. Sniffs wrong, or something."

Pirth is in my paw, er, hand. Not dancing. But here. Like I need him more than this endless tunnel through the White Woods spooks him.

Someone stirs in this invertedly lit room. Gold & green, backwards somehow; I'd passed through many kinds of rooms to get here. These beings are friendly. Not quite human, because too wispy, but too physically present to be Emandians per se. I talked. Nobody knew me. More came. I kept introducing myself, hoping someone might. Then now, & here Pirth.

cxliv.

Pirth stirs in my hand more & more, now dancing on my palm, back & forth, peaceably, happily, at first, but then something more—

restlessly—saying—

saying what?

urging me lean forward, still holding my palm up for him to dance on, but lean more & more, let something go, now more, let, *let*—

I'm horizontal now, the wispy hybrids cheering me, *this is way better* than sitting politely through my book—

& ahead, er, down, a well?

what? *wait?*

OK—I am the author guy of this book—or several—& Maya too, I think, & how many copies are out there? Global Wall's girls had one each, I think—shudder just thinking of them—pink panties & tiny spectacles—

We enter the Well & I wonder what manner of "well" it could be—literal, figurative, the book's next weirdly charming anthropomorphic character?

"Like the Trash Heap?"

"Yes. *Fraggle Rock*. Yes indeed."

"Or maybe I *am* the ship overhead, no more an inert transport vee-hicle than the Boat Wagon or Space Tugboat or Air Currents."

"Or others."

"Yes."

"Are you?"

"What if I was?"

"Well, I'd say hello."

"Hello then."

"Are you from Emandia?"

The Ship laughs. Charming, weird, OK, a *ship's laugh*.

"Not then?"

"They needed transport. We helped."

"We?"

"I. We. Makes no difference."

"So you transport?"

"What is wrong with you? *What is wrong with him?*" seems to be asking Pirth, who is still dancing, more peaceably now, on my outstretched palm.

"He's OK," says Pirth in a low, sweet voice. I haven't heard him speak in *years*.

Now the Ship relents. Good thing I have friends to vouch for me.

"Let me ask you a question, Mister Raymond author guy whatever."

"OK."

"Why do you write things like 'the ships have always been overhead'?"

"Haven't they? Or you?"

"But what does that mean? Am I threat? A promise?"

"Maybe both? Would be something if you just appeared for all to see & none to deny."

"Is that the way you have seen *anything* work in your world?"

"No, I guess not really."

"That's the universe, sonny boy."

"All of them?"

"As an answer to you, yes."

"What about Dreamland? And death?"

The Ship is quiet.

"Are you all of the ships overhead? Or some?"

"Does it matter?"

"Yes."

"You're outcasts, sonny boy. There's no other way to put it."

"Because the Emandians mostly left?"

"*Because you are poison to life. Find your own cure & you are welcomed. Until then, do what you've always done, alone, far from everywhere else.*"

And silence. And we arrive.
 Pirth hops off my palm,
 by way of welcome.

END OF PART
ELEVEN (D) 12/25/2019
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 Orange Hill
 (D)



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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His freeman's prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Been spending his winter "writing to pretty girls and thick skinned friends." Making political cartoons, too, one of which is featured in this issue. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Lisa Bieberman lives in Farmington, Maine. She did a lot of great work on behalf of the psychedelic revolution in the 1960s, in particular running the Psychedelic Information Center in Harvard Square (Cambridge, Massachusetts), & publishing for many years the *PIC Bulletin*. Her *Manual for the Use of LSD* is as helpful to explorers now as it was when published in 1967!

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His fiction appears occasionally in *The Cenacle*. His work in this issue is excerpted from *States of Mercy: A Novel*, published by Alien Buddha in June 2019. These excerpts have made a number of people very interested in getting the book!

John Echem lives in Nigeria & teaches English at local schools. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 109 | October 2019. We are currently working together to get some of his short myth-stories ready for publication in a future issue.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet & engage those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. When I related to her the elongated efforts needed to get my beloved bicycle back to working order, she replied: "so good to have your bike back in order. My bike is a highlight in my day—a gift that lifts me from chasms within minutes." Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His prose appears frequently in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book is *Many Worlds: A Collection of Poems*, published by Modern Memoirs in March 2019. We worked up his piece in this issue from a list of 10 questions I asked him about God, death, dreams, nature, & so on.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book is *Bat Dreams (Nighttime Daydreams Book 2)*, published by Amazon in February 2019. It can be found online at: <https://tinyurl.com/yyw3g6sv>. He & I are currently scheming some additional collaborative publishing work in 2020.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. In our most recent phone call, he described pleasant days spent playing with his grandson, & occasionally driving on his own by the local cannibus farms, for sentimental reasons. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press in 2017.

Sam Knot lives in rural France. His poetry now appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Also visit samknot.com for more of his work. Regarding his poem in this issue (which the October 2019 *Cenacle* had featured in a working journal), he wrote to me that “I looked over my own process, and felt sufficiently distanced/processed to, I believe, finish it . . .”

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent poetry show, “Where the Most Light Falls,” on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). Her first collaborative poem with John Echem in *The Cenacle* appeared in #108 | June 2019.

Martina Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her recent book of poetry, *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*, was published by Deerbrook Editions in November 2019. Her poem “Initialed” (which is published here under the title “Those Initials”) has been nominated for the 2020 Pushcart Prize. Well done! More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

Octavio Paz was born in 1914 in Mexico City, Mexico, & died there in 1998. He is one of the 20th century’s greatest poets. Scriptor Press published the poem of his in this issue as part of the 2004 Burning Man Books series. This volume can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>. For a terrific & insightful discussion of “Sunstone,” visit <https://tiny.cc/sunstone>.

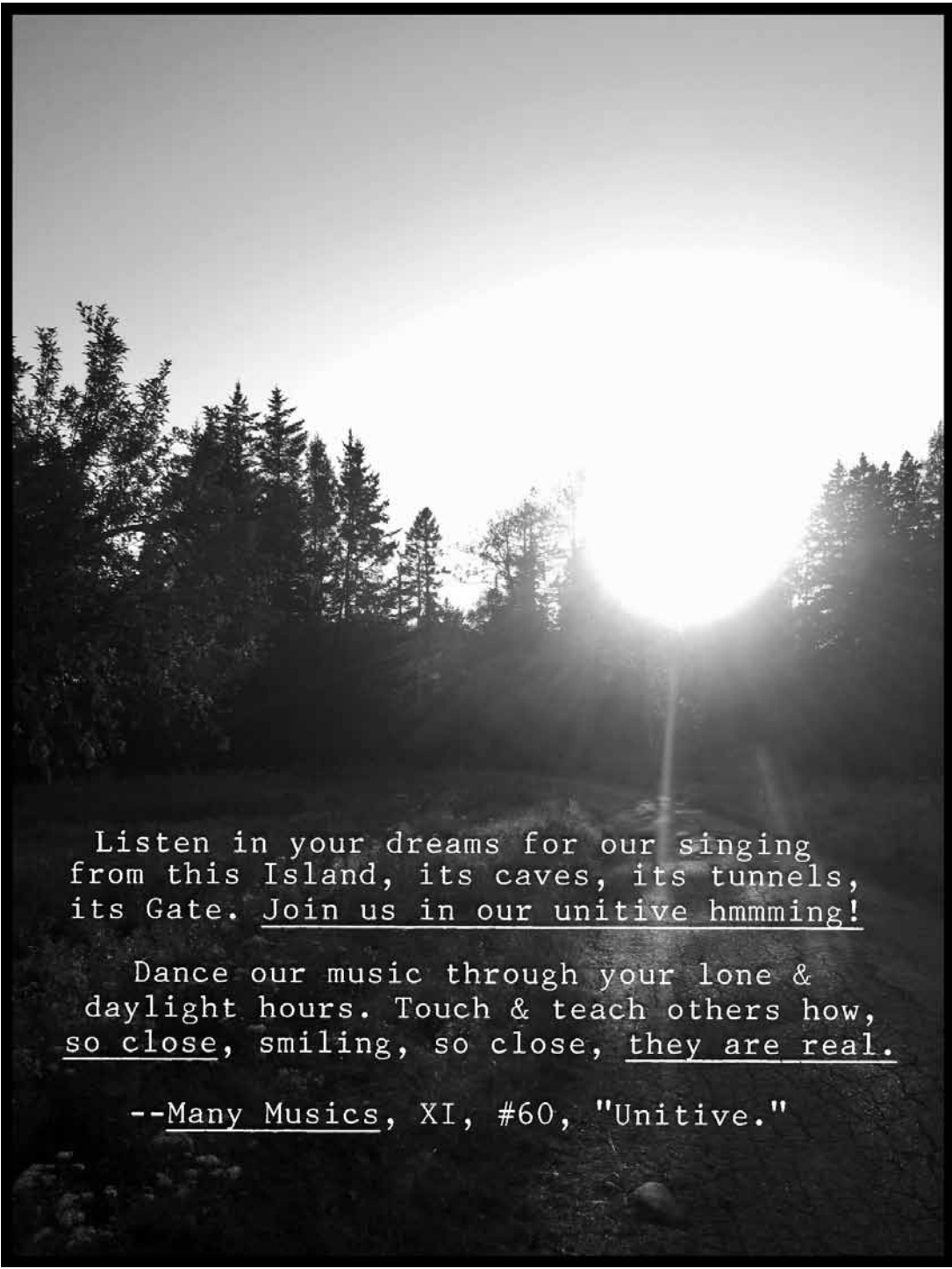
Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Tells me that he’s still writing, while he can. His newest book of poetry is called *Jock Poems and Reflections for Proper Bostonians*, published by Pocol Press in March 2019.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. I recently learned how pretty she looks in soft pale blue. Matches her beautiful turquoise eyes.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. Employed again, writing more, wanting to do right by the world, anew, still learning how.

* * * * *





Listen in your dreams for our singing
from this Island, its caves, its tunnels,
its Gate. Join us in our unitive humming!

Dance our music through your lone &
daylight hours. Touch & teach others how,
so close, smiling, so close, they are real.

--Many Musics, XI, #60, "Unitive."

